**Channel:** SBU English Club

**URL:** https://youtu.be/ujfhV8ytQcw

**Title:** we read Age of Scorpius and have some thoughts

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**Transcript**

Introduction
0:00
Someone had rewritten the history of Conviction Woods, the cursed forest I called home.
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Despite all the texts describing Conviction Woods as eternally uninhabitable, there were hundreds of
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wartime artifacts scattered amongst the forest's grounds. The records had been
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altered to hide the truth of Guardian's last war. A truth that allowed the woods to protect those mysteriously meant to
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survive beyond its boundaries. I lingered at the edge of the farthest northern reach of Conviction Woods.
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Before me stood a crumbled and dilapidated stone arch, old runic etched
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across its surface, worn away by the structure returning to the earth. A few
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fallen stones lay scattered across the surrounding ground, freezing into dirt as ancient remnants conjoined with snow
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and soil. Beyond the arch's gaping mouth lay deciduous's barren territory.
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What a great opener that really gets you hook line and sinker.
1:04
Hello everyone and welcome to another investors meeting of St. Balisar LLC. My
1:09
name is Andrew, co-founder and CEO. I am a threefigure entrepreneur with 22 years
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of experience in the writing industry and I have eight books under my subspecies. Oh. Um, hello. Uh, my name
1:22
is Jay. I'm co-founder and, uh, what's another board member title? Uh, I like a
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COO. It's like a cool. Yeah. What the hell does a COO do? Like a pigeon. Uh, I don't know, but I
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sure am. I sure am that. Um, I I have

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Let's see how many books I've written at this point. I'm going to say a good 12 or so including the poetry collections
1:47
uh that I have written and self-published on Amazon and um what
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what did you say about subspecies? Do I need to talk about that? We are gathered here today because our services have been contravened by fellow literature
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enthusiast Audrey Winter. Uh, Miss Winter has concocted a maleifluous,
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lumbering, circumventing paratextual experience in the form of a novel by the
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name of The Age of Scorpius. The sticking post in the room, however, is that this book has a certain reputation
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which has come to impact several parties bottom lines. For the first time in our organization's history, the book that we
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have read has been officially unpublished. I guess you could say there's no stigmata to self-publishing
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these days. Miss Winter has until the end of Q1 2026 to make a new filing or
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she's not going to be able to amvertise her assets by the end of the fiscal year, which is just going to be hell on
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the balance sheets over the next several business years. Our KPI dashboards have stakeholders a little bit nervous about
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the team's ability to take action on deliverables, but I'm I'm very confident that Jay and I can be tremendously
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assiduous with these endeavors. Yeah, I'm hoping so. Um the CRM was looking a little thin uh ever since
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those pre-orders failed to uh follow through. Um but I think that we can
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probably get this whole World of Guardian vertical back uh on track
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before the end of H2 2025.
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So with that, let's just get the ball rolling. Welcome to the world of St. Balisar. World of St.
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LLC LLC LLC. Yeah. So, behind the bit, our newest member of the English Club
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podcast is Audrey Winter. I'm sure a lot of you guys knew that this was coming cuz we just can't resist a good
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old-fashioned controversial book that may teach us a lot about fiction and
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writing and craft and all of that really good stuff that we just love getting into. Uh, obviously we are a book
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podcast first, so like any of our books, we'll have a little bit of discussion about the controversy, but there are
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honestly way better sources that you can consult for like analyses of certain Tik Toks that Audrey has posted. We'll have
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that in the description that you guys can consult. We're going to focus squarely on the book, which was a very
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interesting experience for the both of us. I think kind of conjured up a lot of memories of starting out as a writer.
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You know, this is a book that Audra had claimed to been working on since she was 12. And let's just say I really, really
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believe it. I really believe it. Do not doubt that for even one moment. I
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feel like I've read this book a million times before in real life English club. I'm so excited to talk about this. It's
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like And of course, uh, we do have a board of beneficial owners. Uh they include such
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illustrious individuals as Draolith, Pink Catsy, Simply FJ, Aiden, Felt,
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Camp, Ren, Arthur, Clyborn, Wrights, Spooks, John Pic, Window, Zuben, Kain,
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Courtney, Hallucina, America, Beep Beeps, Dangerous, Butter Knife, Flamingo, Sugar, Mah, Fins, Tusky, and
5:02
Kynes, Goldfish, Pey, Sophia, Neotips, and Ruth. And we would be nowhere
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without our human capital as we call it in the business right now. Um, our unpaid internship program is currently
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run by Natalia, Malard, Griff, Ace, Evil, Red Flame, Milo is Tired, A
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Marvelous Geek, Will, Peach, Navari, Renee, Constant Blade, Kira, Astro,
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Corrupted Luna, Charlotte, Gecko, Jesus, Onwi, Lol to enter, Aerys, and Grossberg
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law offices. Thank you guys so much for supporting the supporting this this
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family. You know, we're not an organization. We're more of a we're more of a family here. And I think it's it's
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our people. Our people are our greatest assets. I agree. Uh what is a community of
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artists without artists? Without artists.
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It's just a community. And who even cares about that? Who even cares about artists? You know, there money is what matters at the end
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of the day. If you want to support us, we will have links to methods of doing so in our description. All members get

6:09
early access to our content as well as exclusive content like not an audio book, a Kate Crarane's Crown of
6:15
Starlight companion podcast. [Music]
Sparknotes on the Controversy
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All right, Andrew, if you don't mind, if you um how do I put this? If this won't
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cause you to terminate my contract, um would it be um in the interest of the
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shareholders if I at least briefed our audience with a very very short version
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of the Audra background information? Please. Yeah. No, I think that would be very relevant in establishing a baseline
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for us to make further developments in this reg. None of that was corporate speak. I'm just talking like Audra.
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Okay. Go ahead. Go ahead. Okay, so for anybody that doesn't know
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what's going on with this uh Age of Scorpius situation, first of all, congratulations. Um, second of all, Andrew is right.
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There are other places where you can get more detailed versions of this, but I don't want anybody to be left out. So,
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here is seriously like the bare bones of what has happened with Audrey Winter, author of Age of Scorpius.
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So, Audrey Winter is a 22year-old writer. She has been working on this
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book specifically and the world in which it is set since she was 12. So a solid decade ago precoid she actually had
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partnered with an agent and was on the way to getting this book published but it was caught in some part of the
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revision phase for about 3 years and then she and her agent parted ways. Uh
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the reasons for this have not been publicly confirmed, but what we do know is that Audra has told two mutually
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exclusive stories about why she and her agent quit working together. In one version, she was dropped because her
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agent switched to a new genre. However, some people have fact checked that and it seems to be the case that her agent
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is still working in this same genre. So that maybe she switched out of it and
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then switched back into it. Don't know. In any case, the second version of this story is one in which Audra made the
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decision to quit working with this agent in order to maintain full creative control of Age of Scorpius and World of
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Guardian more broadly. So, in any case, she quit working with this agent and then she decided that she was just
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going to self-publish this thing. So, she started gaining some traction on Tik Tok primarily by doing this like
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pity marketing strategy for months and months and months. She was like day number 700 of trying to get my book to
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go viral. Eventually, it did work. And so, she partnered with some artists to complete the book and turn it into this
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like almost luxury product with lots of custom art. So, the focus is no longer just on the story. It's also on all this
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ephemera. You know, you get a print, you get a bookmark, you get this book that has art that depicts characters and
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parts of the world, whatever. This amasses her a pretty a pretty uh half a
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dozen thousand pre-orders. That was such a horribly convoluted way of saying that. Over 6,000 pre-orders
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on this self-published book, which is unheard of for for self-pubed indie books.
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And then a four-page sample releases ahead of the book actually coming out, and people start getting kind of nervous
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because it's not looking super promising. that tension dies down, but then the book actually does come out and
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it does not meet people's expectations remotely. Um, mainly because the actual
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story itself is not up to par. There's grammatical errors, there's words being
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misused, and then the story on the whole is just not as tight as people thought it was going to be. Absolutely. So Audra has since committed
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to working with editors sourced from her audience to republish an updated version in 2026. She's also promising all kinds
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of additional art. This new re-release is like twice the price of what the
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original one was, which people are mad about. And in the meantime, she is working on some chapterby chapter edits
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chronologically, a few of which have been released to patrons and which Andrew and I managed to get our hands
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on. So, if you are a member of Order of the Orb Fox, we will review those chapters live on the air. But that is

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the Audra Winters drama as of today, August 27th, 2025, as I understand it. I
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think that's a good spark notes. There's other like little folds to that, but honestly, I think that's all one really
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needs to know to fully grasp the the situation. The only thing I'll say, and I don't want to talk too much about like
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our analysis of the situation right now when we're about to hit the summary, but I don't care at all about like the whole
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agent thing. Like there's so much there's so much debate about like whether she was dropped or they dropped
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her. It's like when you get broken up with and you're like, "Oh yeah, I totally I totally dumped her." Just to
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like save your own face. Like I'm I'm positive that's exactly what happened there. Like you got to side with AAM's
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razor for these things. I know that there's a lot of mystery, but unfortunately, I think the reality is a lot more boring than than we might
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think. I agree. Especially considering how Audra responded to a lot of criticism when the book was actually released. It
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seems likely that she might be the type of person to part with an agent who was, you know,
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trying to get the book changed in ways that were maybe not even that important, but felt important to Audra.
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So, I think you're probably right about that. Yeah. So, uh, yeah, this is a really unique thing and something really
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tailored almost to the SBU project because this is going to be rewritten. This is actively being rewritten and our
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whole conceit is based off of a fictional version of that concept. So, it's very tantalizing that we're going
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to see a version two of this one day. So, I hope that our suggestions are in line with the vision that Audra will
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have for this book one day. Uh, since that's what we always try to do with our suggestions. It's not just what we think
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it would be good, it's what we think would make this book truer to its mission. So, this will be a good experiment if the if version two ever
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comes out. It will be a very good experiment if version two ever comes out. And I really really hope it does. Yeah.
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Uh I would truly like to see a better version of this book get released and this story have a happy ending for
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everybody. People who pre-ordered the book the first time, the second time, for Audra, for the artists, everybody.
Deep Dive
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Um, and and with that in mind, I would like to begin my summary with a little note to Audra, assuming that she is
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listening and has listened this far. To tell you the truth, Audra, if you are listening, I would I would be really
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pleased to know that you had heard this and that you had at least considered what we have to say. Um, but with that
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in mind, I would like to say that if you're listening, you should probably skip our summary and jump right over to
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the part where we start giving you feedback, both critiques and positives, because to be honest with you, this is a
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show at the end of the day. And so, we're not necessarily going to be super nice in the summary. We're going to tell jokes. We're going to say things that we
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wouldn't say directly to your face because again, it's a show. We're not actually talking to you. Um, but if you
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listen to our feedback and you like what we have to say, maybe then you can go back and listen to the summary. We really do want this book to improve
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and so we are going to give you concrete actionable advice like we have always done in this time the genuine hopes that
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they will make a difference in the world of literature. Um, so so that's my advice to you if you
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are listening and if you like what we have to say and after this is over you want to get in touch with us, please do.
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Hopefully you're there. Hopefully, you're hearing this. And without further ado, I guess we can get right into the summary. Let's do it. We begin not with chapter
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1, but with a prologue that has been sort of conspicuously absent from a lot
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of the discussions of problems with this book. This prologue is like a super
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zoomed out summary of a weird part of this world's history that won't really
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come back for the rest of the novel, but I think it's still worth including because it it might be relevant in the
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rewrite of this. Uh, who knows? And if it's not relevant in the rewrite, that'll be even more interesting because
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it'll indicate something really radically changed. But anyway, we have this prologue where there's some kind of
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quote unquote blurring of the lines between humans and machines in the distant past which caused some kind of
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vague apocalypse and then the stars punished people for this I guess cyborg
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society that they built. It was like a butlerian jihad for people who are familiar with Dune. Like I I
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feel like they just decided they don't like robots or there was some robot war and that was it,
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right? So the survivors of this in any case migrate to this continent called Guardian and separate into what is
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literally a divergent style personality traitbased set of societies only it
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spans a continent and not just one city. Those societies are conviction for law,
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fire and leadership. Asiduous for sustenance, knowledge and protection,
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atic for water, healing and travel. And societal, the society called societal
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for light, magic, and art. Each society also gets three star signs, but as I put
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it in my notes here, I dGF about that because it basically doesn't matter at all. But just know that each of them
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also gets some star signs. The grouping is very interesting to me because there's no I don't know I don't know zodiac stuff, but I know that
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they're associated with like classical elements. And the grouping is completely
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arbitrary here. It's not like all the water signs are together and all the earth signs are together or there's some
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like equal mix of each. It just seems like they're slapped around. But again, if if someone knows more about like
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zodiac than me, maybe there's an explanation, but not one that I had. I would love to know that as well
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because I don't know much about zodiac either, but I do know a little bit about what crosses over with tarot. And the
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zodiac signs each have associated tarot cards and sometimes the zodiac signs also get associated with the minor
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arcana in tarot, but it doesn't seem like there's a connection there either.
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So, I would love to know people who are more star sign literate, let us know what's going on with this. That like
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super zoomed out introduction aside, we then begin the book proper where we have our main character, Ra, exploring the
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conviction woods, a place where, well, she's out in a part of it that she's not supposed to be in, tracing some writing
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on some ancient stones that seem to suggest evidence of a war between
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conviction and assiduous. But the twist is it's a war that has seemingly been
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erased from history. Audra or Ra is
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Ra is already aware that there is some kind of conspiracy going on to alter the
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history of the continent. And so she's tracing these runes on these archways
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all around the woods to try to figure out what actually went down. While she's out there exploring, doing her grave
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rubbings, she's spotted by two guards on the assiduous side of the border. And so
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she like retreats into the conviction woods because they are warded. Anybody
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who's an outsider like basically activates some kind of curse as soon as
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they step into the woods and they turn into this nightmare hellscape full of
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basically demons. And the trees get all spooky and twisted and the light gets
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dark. Demon wolves, rip your rip your legs off. Yeah. So, the guards see her. She retreats
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into the woods and then the guards pause right at the edge and they have this conversation about whether or not the woods being cursed is real or whether
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it's a government conspiracy. So, one of them eventually does go in after her and
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is immediately attacked by this demon wolf who like drools blood and smells like corpses and she gets totally
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traumatized and then she runs away. But Ra is not affected by this. No, she's immune. She She survives.
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That's the word they always use. If you don't die, you survive. I don't I don't know if that makes sense, but it it the
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word survived is used even if it doesn't fit in the sentence is what I'm trying to say. Okay. So Ra goes home. She lives
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in this little cottage core cabin with her halfsister Aia and their parents. They share a mom, but Ra does not share
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Aia's father. Anyway, Ra is scolded by Aia for showing
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emotion, which is one of the rules of the Scorpio code. Scorpios are not allowed to show any emotion. They're
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also not supposed to form any kinds of bonds, especially not love bonds. Mhm. And Scorpio's unique in having such a a
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a draconian code. Other other signs,
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and again, it doesn't even work like classical star signs where there's like stereotypes that we're familiar with of
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whatever star sign affect like their personality. Like I don't I don't know like if anything about Scorpios
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classically is emotionless or sexless or things like that which is the point of
19:16
the Scorpio code but like it doesn't like Libras don't have a Libra code that they'll die if they're you know this
19:23
it's like this dystopian thing just for Scorpios right like there are other sort of loose
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guidelines for other star signs like since you mentioned Libra Libras are not supposed to get too fit right
19:36
uh which I thought was kind of an interesting detail. And and Chase, a Libra, who we're about to meet in a minute, is notably SW.
19:44
Uh so like he's kind of a bit of an outsider within Libra, but like nobody's hunting him down, trying to kill him for
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that. So it's a little weird that they're the only ones that have this, but whatever.
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They do. So she gets scolded and then the two of them and and their parents as well get prepared for a capital C ceremony not
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far from home. the capital city of the whole continent. Yeah, they're going to the inciting
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incident festival. It's this is the most inciting incident of inciting incident ceremonies. It's
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worse than divergent because it's just so small scale. It's like her, her
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sister, and this guy Chase who we are just meeting now. There might be five people in attendance and it makes it
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feel like it's at an amphitheater at like a camp, you know, like it's not a grandiose location. There's a little bit
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of a blood ceremony where their stupid magic powers activate, but like this is
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this is pre-lapserian in terms of like bad inciting incident sequences. It is bizarre how lowkey it
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is. Like ostensibly the purpose of this ceremony is to like officially swear these kids in as citizens of their
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respective star signes, but like you said, it feels like they're
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just at an amphitheater at like a summer camp or something. I was literally imagining a public park and they're
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like, I don't know, standing on some wooden benches or something for all the fanfare it has.
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It feels so weirdly lowkey. One little worldbuing detail that I did want to
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make sure that I worked in that I thought was kind of neat was that somewhere in here they throw out the idea that there's various agencies and
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like groups, governments mainly, that want to figure out how the curse on Conviction Woods works so that they can
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either weaponize it or circumvent it. And I was really hoping that that would become part of the plot because it
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sounds kind of neat. like if there's an entity that makes this happen, can they strike a pact with it and allow their
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armies to march through the woods when others can't? But no, it doesn't. That never happens. Maybe in book two, maybe
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in the rewrite of book one, right? But there's an interesting fault to the ceremony that I thought would turn into
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something and it's kind of handwaved in a way that I think is even more funny where uh you know, Aia, Ra, and their
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parents live in the the part of Conviction Woods that could should kill you. They live in the part they survive
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in the the woods in this like idyllic little house. And this is specifically illegal. And it's also specifically
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illegal that her parents are cohabitating or even know each other
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carnally. And it's double super illegal because since Ra is born under the star
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sign of Scorpio, she is not allowed to live with other star signs. And I'm
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like, okay, wait, that's kind of bad. Don't people die over this? And then they do her blood ceremony. And the
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creepy inciting incident lady is like, "Huh, we know that you guys have been living together, but you you just got
22:45
inducted now, so we're just going to kick you out of your home. You're you're going to get away with it this one time." Which makes them seem very
22:52
toothless. This the Scorpio Stellarium that that runs the country or whatever,
22:57

right? It's so weird. the the Scorpio Stellarium is constantly going to be basically all powerful whenever it makes
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for an interesting combat sequence and then they're going to be completely ineffective whenever they're having
23:10
infinite power would basically bring the plot to a halt. Sure. So this lady is like, "Yeah, so what
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you're doing is against the law and technically under the Scorpio code, you should be killed for breaking that." Uh
23:23
but it's like whatever. just figure something else out. Which is fortunate that Chase is there
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then because Chase is like, "Okay, I live in the dorms in this one hub
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building that also functions as," hold on, let make sure I get this right. The
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Conviction Aluran embassy. The Exchange Center. Correct. I guess that's true. Might not
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be an embassy. It might be a trade. It's called an exchange center. Capital
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E, capital C. So, I don't know what that means. I guess I guess MS forum cultural exchange forum, a student
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union, if you will, right? Chase is like, "Yeah, I can I can get you a room there if you come with me."
24:07
And Ra's like, "Well, I literally don't have any other option right now, so sure. What the hey, why not?" On their
24:14
way back, uh, they have this little exchange and Ra is really irritated by Chase being kind of a chatterbox, but
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she manages to clock that he's lying about the place he says that he grew up. She doesn't press him on it. Um, but he
24:26
mentions, you know, having this normal upbringing, and she's like, he's definitely lying about that, right? So, they get rooms worked out. There's
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like this really pedestrian, dull, like bureaucratic, can we get her a room
24:39
scene when they get to the front desk of the embassy, but she gets a room. It's like whatever. During that conversation,
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she had for some reason offered to let Chase come with her next time she goes illegal
24:51
uh rune rubbing even though she said she didn't like him in her internal narration. But the next day, she decides
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that she's going to go and uh he comes with her. They notice uh like an odd number of Scorpio Stellarium
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guys out in the city that day, which from now on I'm going to call Scorpio cops because I've saw Stellarium a

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million times. That's what they are. They're Scorpio cops. They're that exist to arrest Scorpios and kill them when
25:18
they do things that Scorpios aren't supposed to do. So, they notice that there's a bunch of these guys out and about. And that prompts Chase to
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pressure Ra basically into admitting that she doesn't like the Scorpio code.
25:34
Yeah. which is really weird considering that literally earlier that morning as
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they were walking to their illegal graverbubbing thing that they're doing,
25:46
they witnessed a guy, a Scorpio dragged out of his home and taken to an
25:53
execution chamber because he was caught having sex with somebody.
25:58
But Jay, but Jay, the Scorpio knows Ra's name, so that's very that's very mysterious. I wonder if that will pay
26:04
off later on. I'm sure that it will pay off um in name at least there will be something
26:11
there will be a nod to that loop being closed. Sure. So,
26:17
so they go grave rubbing. They come across this arch and Chase can read it
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despite not knowing how he can do so. It's this ancient like implied to be
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quasi lurggical alphabet of a language that is specifically forgotten and he's
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just like oh I can read this and and and just accepts it and there
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I hate this part. She's just like Driscoll I think is the name of the language.
26:49
Yeah. So he can read this language that hasn't been spoken in who knows how long. And then he he he reads it out
26:55
loud and touches the arch which activates something some kind of magical effect which which then you know fizzles
27:02
out as soon as he had activated it. Mhm. But what he does catch is that it mentions something called the Klexus,
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which is this mythical sword that grants slashcurses you with immortality,
27:14
which is a power that is stored in it by this mythical hero named Matias Merik.
27:20
Okay, so then we get like the first of many lore dumps. According to RA,
27:27
the sword is best known from a fable that is meant to teach children the importance of magical balance. Yes.
27:34
In which Mias stores immortality in the sword at the behest of the son. And then
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when Matias's son Silas touches the sword, he quote unquote falls to temptation and touches the sword. He is
27:48
then quote unquote cursed with immortality. So this is meant to be allegedly a fable that teaches magical
27:55
balance. I don't know in what way the story I've just described teaches you that. I can see I think a conceptual
28:04
thread where the idea is that immortality is imbalanced because it goes on forever.
28:10
But the story is really doesn't thread that needle for me, especially not what is supposed to be a children's story.
28:16
So all that happens and then they just go back. Yeah. But on their way back, Chase remembers
28:22
something. He's seen these runes before and it happens to be in a part of the
28:27
building that they were already in. So Chase gets permission to go to this staff only part of the exchange him and
28:36
right and so him and Ra go check it out and as they're investigating they find these runes that are just in you know
28:42
some otherwise unused hallway and they start poking them and then two Scorpio goons emerge out of the shadows
28:49
and start trying to literally kill them the way that like an invader does in Elden Ring basically. Um, but they
28:57
managed to poke the runes in such a way that it opens a gateway that only they can enter. So that, you know, they
29:03
stumble through, right? Uh, beaten and bruised, but okay. And they're not able to be pursued for some reason or
29:09
another. These guys get get caught on the fog wall, I guess, and they they can't follow them. It's a It's a wall also like in Elden
29:16
Ring that you can just hit with your sword and it'll open up for you 100%. Uh, Chase uses some light magic to
29:24
illuminate the room. And then horror of horrors, he heals RA with the forbidden.
29:30
That's an arch power. Libren healing arch power. That's one of the three that was mentioned in the
29:37
ceremony. You're not allowed to do that. The other two, since I think we forgot, are zodiac turning and spirit walking.
29:44
More on that later. Anyway, so much more. so so much more about zodiac turning and spirit walking. Chase
29:51

heals her and she's like, "That's weird. How can you do that?" And he's like, "Don't worry about it right now."
29:57
They realized that they're in the Scorpio archive. Capital S, capital A, a
30:03
place for which we have no context, but it's really important because it's
30:09
capitalized. Apparently, there's 12 of these archives, one for each star sign, in case that
30:15
wasn't obvious. And inside this archive, they find a letter dated from the war of
30:20
rebalancing. Now, this is not the same war that allegedly has been erased from history. This is a war that the
30:26
characters know happened, but parts of its history have been altered according
30:31
to the whims of various government officials who will be mentioned very shortly. Um, Andrew, I
30:38
believe you excerpted part of this letter in the dramatic readings. Is that correct?
30:45
To the Atarian Stellarium, I am writing to document the unpreventable injustice internally
30:52
occurring within the conviction Stellarium. We are experiencing a violation of human rights through the
30:59
weaponization of religion. The gods will not be pleased. Blaine has fabricated
31:05
and enacted a law underneath the title of the Scorpio Code. The Scorpio Code
31:10
contains three tenants. Never show emotion, never befriend, and never fall
31:15
in love. Blaine claims to have located the scripture concealed within the Scorpio archive. His status as an
31:22
adjunct to the Scorpio Stellarium allows him to establish validity in the discovery of this holy oath. Following
31:30
Blaine's attribution to the lack of the code to the imbalance of the zodiac turners, the majority of Scorpio's
31:36
population has accepted the code. This law strips the right of choice from Scorpio individuals with a capital I and
31:44
thus encourages them to join the Stellarium. Despite losing the war, the Scorpio
31:50
Stellarium will maintain the governmental influence and dictation of the economy. Furthermore, I regret to
31:56
inform you, what is this, a job application, that Blaine inflicted himself with the blade of the
32:02
Collelexus. I predict he will manipulate the truth of the Collelexus and its existence to preserve his power for an
32:09

undeterminable amount of time. I have since regained possession of the Collelexus and it has been returned to
32:15
the Nyx Mountains to prevent further damage to Guardian's magic system.
32:20
Sincerely, Silus Merik. I love that everything about this entire
32:26
novel plot-wise hinges on the actions of these characters hundreds of years ago
32:31
who we barely know anything about. care about and a sword that just exists for some
32:36
reason. Basically, this letter explains that some guy in the past made the Scorpio
32:43
code up. It was not in fact handed down from the gods and he pretended that it was divinely inspired to make it seem
32:49
more legit essentially. Um, and the author of this letter claims to be Silus Merrick. I don't know why I said claims
32:55
to be. It is Silus Merrick. I thought maybe there would be some there's no duplicitousness. Yeah. for
33:00
all this like talk about rewriting history, there's never going to be a moment where like characters are tricked
33:06
or identities are altered or anything like that, which is very funny since Ra
33:11
has like this shape-shifting ability where she can transmute like materials.
33:18
Later on, we're going to learn about powers where you can like go into people's dreams and affect them through theirs. I'm like, "Oh, a bad actor could
33:24
like pretend to be maybe someone's dad and deliver information about going to a
33:30
very precarious location unprotected." But as we will find out in short order,
33:35
that does not occur. No, nobody seems capable of coming up with these kinds of schemes. Um, I
33:41
thought maybe it wouldn't be Silus Merrick because it seems awfully convenient that they just stumble into this room and they immediately find the
33:47
one letter that confirms the thing that Ra suspected all along, right? And then the characters conclude
33:55
that they were led here by somebody with intent. So I was thinking like, okay,
34:00
this is definitely some kind of setup, but no, it isn't. Somebody did want them to find this, but only for good reasons.
34:06
For good reasons. Yeah. So they know Chase and Ra do that. They've been seen by the Scorpio cops
34:12

and they know that they have access to this illegal information. So they're like, "Our heads are going to roll if we
34:19
are caught." So, they decide that they're going to go into hiding. Step
34:24
one of going into hiding is going back down to the dorms and asking Chase's
34:29
friend if they can crash in his dorm room overnight. Just one door over
34:38
there. And then, mind you, this is meant to be a very urgent situation, right?
34:44
Cuz they think they're going to die. The plot stops so that Robin can make fun of
34:50
Chase for his sexual proclivities, which include having recently hooked up with
34:57
some guy. I guess Robin thought Chase was straight, but it turns out he's by, and so we have to have this protracted
35:03
scene where we're making fun of Chase for being by or something. And it's really just really weird. Eventually,
35:11
Robin does let them inside and then they they stay there for the night and and that's the scene.
35:16
That's where they introduce the fourth arch power by eraser.
35:22
Okay, speaking of people coming to people in dreams, fathers specifically, Ra's dad does come to her in a dream low
35:30
that very eve and it is really him. Um, and she's shocked because her dad is
35:36
supposed to be a water mage, not a dream seeker. But then he's just like, "Don't worry, sweetie, honey pie. It I've
35:42
always been both or whatever. It's like not a big deal." And she's like, "Okay, sure." So he tells her, "Go meet up with
35:49
Aia in the woods ASAP because yes indeed, your lives are in danger." She wakes up though to find that there's
35:55
been a huge blizzard overnight. And so they're kind of snowed in. And not only that, but the Scorpio cops are already
36:02
in the building and they're raiding the dorm rooms one after the other. But they haven't gotten to this one yet. Chase
36:08
and RA sneak out through an emergency exit stairwell, get caught in a blizzard, and then having woken up mere
36:16
pages ago, Ra falls back asleep. They just stumble around in the snow. I
36:22
realize that their lives are in danger. I realize that, you know, they had to get out of that building, but there's
36:28

something in the way that that scene is described that basically just implies that they stroll out and just start
36:35
spinning around. Like, it's just it's not even disorienting in a way that you
36:40
would think of like a being in a blizzard would be disorienting. You just walk around and eventually you fall
36:47
asleep or you pass out or whatever, right? It doesn't feel intentionally disorienting at all. Ra wakes up to find
36:54
Chase healing her and they are quickly spotted by a mysterious figure who's
36:59
like follow me into my home people who I just met out in the snow and they're like well we are wanted
37:06
criminals and very gullible so I guess we will just follow this guy which turns
37:12
out to be a fine decision because he doesn't have anything unourred in mind for them in fact this is none other than
37:20
Atlas Fulbright Right. Aia's boss essentially and also Aries president.
37:27
President Arctura. Yes. Arura. That is the term that they use for leaders of the Stellariums which
37:34
is a government. So he's president Aries. Apparently he is the one who
37:41
orchestrated some part of this to make them find the archive. and double
37:47
apparently a big chunk of the government, many of the governments in fact, already know what they've found
37:54
and want them dead for it and or secretly want them to succeed. So Atlas
38:00
is there to be like, look, some of us are on your side, some of us are kind of against you, but you've got to get out
38:05
of here. So this is interesting to me. This is something I want to call out while it's still relevant is like Ra and Chase are
38:12
learning that they are like pawns in this big game now. and and Atlas specifically cannot like directly
38:19
provide help because that would be betraying Scorpio and cause a war or whatever. So, it it is very cool to me
38:27
that like all of these people are going to have like a vested interest but very indirect influence over the events of
38:34
the story and everyone could be three steps ahead of you in the chess game or
38:40
whatever. So, I I liked this part a lot is what I wanted to say. there is room for psychological drama if
38:47

if Audra feels like tapping into that in future drafts, right? Atlas gives them uh this map basically
38:54
and they figure out where the collectus is. It doesn't really matter, but they decide to start heading in that general direction. So, as they're planning their
39:00
crosscontinental trip, they get approached. As they are on their way, they are attacked by a Duchess from
39:08
Elden Ring Night Reign who demands their map and they don't give it to her and so they fight. This fight I actually
39:15
thought was pretty cool because there's this moment of tension. They're on the border of the woods and not the woods.
39:21
So Ra is like, "Okay, if we can position this fight just right, I can like chuck
39:26
her into the woods or I can push her into the woods or whatever." And we have numbers on our side, so we might be able
39:32
to to hem this girl in. But then what happens is ultimately she does manage to
39:38
push this asalent into the woods, but she drags Chase in with her. And this is
39:44
where it all goes wrong because we learn within a second that not only is Chase immune to the woods, uh, but so is this
39:52
attacker. So all of the interesting tension that's been developed about this
39:57
wood situation and also regarding this character is just immediately annihilated forever because now the
40:04
woods are not a threat to our villains or our main characters. So I don't even know why they are the way they are.
40:10
It's just pretty common to be immune from the woods. It's like having like a peanut allergy. You know what I mean?
40:16
Like a lot of people are allergic to peanuts but not everybody. So it just kind of depends on who you know
40:21
basically. So Ra pushes her into the woods. She drags Chase down. Nothing happens. And Ra's like, "Well, that
40:28
didn't work." So then they just knock her out and leave her there. And uh they head to Chase's house to regroup. Also,
40:34
Avia is there at this point, by the way. She she joined up with them. You say that like it's sudden, but but it's like
40:41
they pick her up and press A and then she joins the party. Like there's not even much of a discussion. She's like,
40:47
"Hey, it's me, Avia. I'm here. Let's go." We had had this all this establishment of Aia being like, I don't

40:53
care about your stupid charcoal grave rubbings. I I just want to be a cool
40:59
Aries and live by my rules. You're dumb. And then she's just like, "Hey, uh, I
41:05
know you guys are wanted fugitives and you will die, but I'm just going to walk around with you and be kind of grumpy
41:12
about it, but not even about it. Just be kind of grumpy, period." Um, I will be kind of grumpy, but mostly
41:19
I'll be offscreen. So, just remember that remember everything Andrew just said about Aia because that will be the
41:25
state of her character from now until the final page of the book. They decide that they are going to go to Chase's
41:32
house now because it's not far away. And this is where we learn Chase lives in the woods as well. So, not only is he
41:38
not only is he immune to the woods, but he also lived in the woods the whole time. He freaking lives there. Um, they go to his house. His dad is
41:45
there. His dad is like, "Uh, y'all look tired from your Pokemon journey. Do you
41:50
want to rest and restore the hell of your party or whatever?" And they're all like, "Yeah, sure. We're like totally
41:57
being pursued by assassins, but like I guess we can fade to black and then save
42:02
our game and move on in a few hours." While Ra is napping though, she has this dream where some of her like childhood
42:09
teachers are physically attacking her for showing emotion in in in Scorpio
42:14
school. Um, but then a child version of the assassin from
42:20
earlier saves her and then she wakes up in pain and there's some mysterious magic gathering
42:27
in her arms. the same mysterious magic that briefly gathered in her arms during the capital C ceremony a little bit
42:34
earlier. So, something strange is going on there. I sure hope she doesn't have some kind of illegal arch power.
42:41
Of course, that would just be very um this girl, this assassin girl, uh I
42:47
don't know if this will come up in your summary, but something that jumped out to me about uh the girl visav these
42:53
flashbacks which are very very night bane in their execution. The assassin
42:58
flips off like jerks in every single one. Like specifically sticks up her middle finger at every single one. And I

43:06
just think that's so funny. It's very It's very Cold Steel the Hedgehog where her hobbies include murder, saving
43:12
innocent girls, and flipping off bullets. She's super cool, you guys. She has
43:18
platinum blonde hair, and she wears all black and a mask. And she loves daggers.
43:24
She's really awesome. She loves daggers. Yeah. Yeah. So that's that's the assassin.
43:29
The assassin. Yeah. So Ra is going to have more dreams about this assassin. I won't I won't summarize all of them, but
43:35
just know that we've started as far back in the past as we're going to go. And from here on, these dreams will slowly
43:42
catch up to the present, indicating that they are perhaps not dreams at all, but rather memories that are returning. As
43:48
you said, Allah Nightbane. So they leave Chase's house. Their dad's like, "Here's some Uncrustables and apple slices for
43:54
the road." And they start taking this neutral trade route to LRA, which is a
44:00
city that's known for being artsy in societal. I don't know what it means for
44:05
a city in societal to be artsy because I thought that all of the cities in societal were artsy. So like, it does
44:12
this one even matter? I don't It doesn't really Jay, it's clearly a reference to the Lightark TTRPG character, Lero Muerte.
44:19
Oh my god. Tell me more. That's actually all I remember from that campaign.
44:25
They get to town without really any issues and everyone is wary of them though when they get there. like people
44:31
sort of give them weird glances and they're very hesitant and then they
44:36
realize it's because of Ra's Scorpio presence because it's the way she
44:42
chooses to dress herself because at the inciting incident ceremony you're given like a letterman jacket which has a a
44:50
big old thing with your with your star sign on it. Yeah. So, they get to town and Ra,
44:55
wanted criminal known for being a Scorpio, decides she's going to continue wearing her big t-shirt that says, "I am
45:02
Ra the Scorpio," instead of shapeshifting it, which is the one power that we know that she has. And then,
45:09
now, stop me if you've heard this one before, Andrew. Um, a stranger sort of approaches them and is like, "Come with

45:15
me into this building, you guys. I'm going to help you out." And they're like, "Well, we're wanted criminals and
45:22
gullible, so I guess we will." And then they do, and it works out just fine.
45:27
This is duh, party member number four, a water mage named Kaya, who like the
45:35
Scorpio boy earlier, knows Ra, but Ra doesn't know her. So, that's totally
45:40
weird. And something definitely strange is going on. Ka uh pulls him into this abandoned building. it doesn't really matter. But
45:46
she's like, "Hey, the Scorpio cops are waiting at the market in the middle of town, so you can't go there to reprovision. Uh, we need to find another
45:54
way out of here." And she also tells Ra a little bit more about how she knows her. She's like, "Ra, you totally
46:00
rescued my brother from some Scorpio cops like what is it a year ago or something like that."
46:06
And Ra is like, "I I don't remember that." Um, but then they think to change her
46:13
outfit. So Ra changes the color of her clothes and they decide they're going to split up,
46:18
make their way through town in pairs, and then reconvene on the other side. Ka's kind of a cool character. Tell me
46:24
about Kai. She seems to have like wisdom and power. Uh
46:30
that actually might be all there is to her character. Yeah, I initially liked her. She She does seem
46:35
like the wisest of the group. Like despite Ra allegedly being this sort of
46:42
rugged individualist who also a survivalist a little bit who who goes out into the woods for long stretches of
46:48
time and like makes her own maps and stuff. She comes across as extremely ignorant and meanwhile Kai is
46:54
like a little bit more cautious. She has more confidence about her. But anyway,
47:00
she's in their party now. And like all the other party characters that aren't Ra, she'll just sort of exist. She
47:07
doesn't do anything. She does one thing and then like immediately after this. Yeah.
47:12
Okay. They make it to the edge of town where they decide they're going to stay at an inn, but then they wake up the
47:18
next morning and are caught before they can leave. So, they're ambushed basically in the lobby. Uh the Scorpio
47:24
Arctura Reed President Vina confronts them and attempts to arrest them with a

47:31
little squadron of goons. Verina and Ra have a mid-off where Verina is like, "I'm the most boring
47:38
villain you've ever encountered. I'm evil and I want to stop you." And Ra's like, "Yeah, well, I'm a protagonist and
47:44
I don't want to be stopped by a villain." Um, so then there's a little scuffle and the group
47:50
runs away. Uh, they make it to a cliff. I didn't realize there was a cliff in
47:56
this city until this exact moment. Yeah, Lyra's a cliffy thing. It's a cliffy thing, of course. Uh, how
48:02
could I have forgotten? They make it to the edge of of a cliff and Ka pulls out
48:08
this insane move where she has them all jump off of the cliff and then summons
48:15
waves that they ride on down the whole hillside. Which, this is maybe a
48:22
nitpick, but it wasn't clear to me that water mages could just create huge
48:29
amounts of water that you could then ride. It It was strange to me that Kaya is able to like water bend andor create
48:36
water in such a way that like you can ride it down a cliff side. It feels I
48:41
don't know. It feels a little too generous with what this power should maybe be able to do. It's really odd.
48:46
You could see him do like a cool little skateboarding move and they like they like do the Mario Kart thing where if you grind right and do a flip, you get a
48:53
speed boost. So they they they get away and they make it to this little port town without
48:59
issues. Um but then they find that the Scorpio assassin has gotten there ahead
49:05
of them. So there's another little scuffle in which Ra and this assassin
49:10
whose name we know now is N. Um, Ra hits N with zodiac turning. Okay, so what is
49:17
zodiac turning? Zodiac turning is this magic that has been popping up in Ra's arms every now and then. And in this
49:24
moment where she gets really angry, she finally unleashes it. It's like this little thing where she punches out her arm and then twists it and a wheel pops
49:32
up and it changes the affected person's zodiac sign. We'll come back to that,
49:38
but that's what it does for now. This knocks Ra out. And so then we have a scene transition where she wakes back up
49:45
and now they're on a boat uh which Kaya is steering and they're going down the river in the direction they wanted to go
49:51
all along. So that all worked out just fine. Then Ra has another dream about

49:57
her and N. This time they're fleeing into Conviction Woods on the run from some Scorpio cops who have ghost dogs.
50:03
Um, and then there's like And then there's like another gay couple that are Scorpios and they save the
50:10
couple from the Scorpio cops and they like totally rip out the Scorpio cops' hearts and they brutalize them just like
50:16
Isa Heart Ripper and it's really awesome. Hold on. Hold on. It's important. It's important that our readers at home know
50:24
that they are wearing Theion masks. Like they it they're literally wearing wolf masks and possibly also clip-on tails as
50:32
they like like they like they are kids on their mother's trampoline trying to
50:38
shift like they are. It's so funny to imagine. Just imagine like you're a cop
50:44
for a second and you're trying to like bust some kids and you get eviscerated by a couple of furries. Like that's what
50:50
the scene was. And I and I love that. I'm saying that as a positive thing. You can't just conflate barians and furries like that. Andrew, we're going
50:56
to have two niche communities. Okay, sorry. They're different. They're different things. They're different things. Sorry. You get eviscerated by
51:02
Theorans. I don't know if this is going to come up later cuz it also doesn't really matter in the long term, but half
51:09
of the couple that uh Ra and Na save is Ka's brother. This is why Ka knows Ra's
51:16
name from the beginning cuz Ra introduces herself to the couple after she saves them, right? And presumably
51:21
that this kid told Ka before he then right? Died anyway later, I believe,
51:27
which is kind of sad when you think about it. It is pretty sad. So, Ra wakes up from that dream only to find herself in the
51:34
middle of a throwaway action scene from a children's animated summer blockbuster. The boat is like careening
51:40
towards a waterfall. And Ka's like, "Uh, you guys are going to want to see this."
51:46
And then they're like, "Ah, we're going down the waterfall or whatever." And then they're fine. There's a giant hurricane. Yeah. It doesn't matter. and they have
51:52
to get to the eye of the storm and but they they barely miss some rocks and it's so it gave me a headache.
51:59

It's so everything that you've already seen a million times. Um the boat crashes but everyone is okay. They wash
52:05
up on the side of the river and they miraculously find a cave to chill out
52:10
in. Chase starts bleeding heavily from his hands and then he kind of like goes knuckles mode and just clinically
52:17
explains that it's part of how his powers work. like if he uses them too much, he starts bleeding and and he just
52:24
he says it in the most boring way imaginable, like totally unconcerned. Um
52:30
it's it's like he's describing how he can put his magic inside of marbles that then if he hands to you within 10
52:35
seconds, you can use to copy the magic. It's very tonally inconsistent.
52:40
It's really bad. Yeah. Um so then guess what they do next, Andrew? Now that they have um taken one
52:47
step forward. Well, certainly they take two steps back close. I'm hoping that
52:53
there will be a moment where we can learn a little bit more about Zodiac turning. Maybe a nice little training
52:59
montage where we can we can develop some of these things that have been introduced. Maybe maybe N can return. I
53:07
don't those are really great ideas, but um something even better happens and that's they go to sleep. They they go to sleep
53:13
and they take a rest and then they wake up again. And isn't that lovely? It's a little microcosm of
53:20
most of our lives. Well, they have to heal somehow, Jay. That's right. Everyone sleeps. This is this is realism.
53:26
Realism. They're just so attentive to the small details. Uh these little characters. So,
53:32
they wake up um and they realize that the cave they're in has like this arch in it that leads to like some
53:37
underground ruins. And by some contrivance, Chase is familiar with the existence of these ruins. So they start
53:44
wandering through them and RA uses this as an opportunity to info dump about
53:49
Silus and the Collelexus. And a lot of it is information that we've actually already heard before and some of it is
53:54
new, but honestly, I don't even really care. So Andrew, do you have something to add about this? I don't think I fully
54:00

understand the backstory of this of this book, but I can I can give you enough working knowledge so you know what these
54:07
proper nouns are. So, Matias Merik is literally of God. He
54:14
is divine. He's like sent by God like like Jesus to be the avatar of God. I
54:21
don't understand exactly how that works. Um, he created the colleus however many
54:27
centuries ago by like condensing divine energy into one thing for I guess
54:34
humanity's protection. I'm not really sure why. Silas Merik is the son of
54:40
Matias and some woman named Mari. I
54:45
don't think she matters at all. I think her name only comes up a couple times, but I'm probably wrong. and Blaine
54:51
Spring. Those spoilers, I shouldn't say Blaine Spring yet. Silus has some brother and then an adopted or like
54:58
fostered brother named Blaine who was just like friends with the trueborn
55:03
children of Matias and Mari. Kind of like Carara in Undertale. Like he's just
55:09
this little dark boy off in the corner. Um so he this is all information that
55:16
we've learned between the letter and the myth. Blaine would go on to found the Scorpio code and steal the Collelexus,
55:24
give himself immortality, but somehow Silus stole it back and hid it in the
55:30
stupid mountains that our heroes are currently going to. Uh, that's kind of
55:36
it. There's some other things that we'll get into visav which of these characters are related to these figures, but that's
55:43
the extent of the knowledge I got from the prehistory of Age of Scorpius. That's um much better than I would have
55:50
done. So, thank you for that slash Jen. Um, I I guess we should make it I should have made it clear earlier because I
55:56
don't think I I did that this whole time what they've been going after is this
56:01
sword, the Collelexus, which they think if they are in possession of will in
56:07
some way provide proof that the government is lying about the origins of
56:13
the Scorpio code and then the Scorpio code will go away. Conceivably, that is
56:20
their goal. It is the same plot as National Treasure Book of Secrets. Uh if
56:25
they find this McGuffin, it will prove the innocence or it will save the day

56:31
basically. And I think the reason this is is because since the Collelexus is divine and the Scorpio code
56:38
implies that it's not divine. No, it does. I don't know why this will will fix
56:43
everything. Just like I didn't understand the plot of National Treasure Book of Secrets. But all I'm saying is if I lived in this world and the colleus
56:51
was supposed to be some kind of lynchpin rhetorical device that would prove that
56:56
my life was a lie, it would fail because I don't understand in what way the
57:02
collectus is related to the laws that are supposedly lies. Because um the
57:08
thing about laws is they can't be lies. That's not how laws work. Laws can't be
57:14
proven false in the way that this book continually phrases it. Um, they can be
57:19
immoral, they can be reprehensible, they can be ineffective, but laws can't be
57:25
can't be wrong in the sense of like incorrect. They can be enacted under false
57:31
pretenses, which I think is what we're going for here. But the thing is even if
57:36
the laws were commanded or were suggested or were uh strongly
57:42
recommended by God and the laws were bad,
57:48
you as a human person would still have if you assuming you have free will, you would still have the ability if not the
57:55
right to say no gods of the pantheon, that is a bad law and I'm not going to
58:02
follow it. then you would be forced to face whatever consequences you may or may not face, assuming you couldn't get
58:07
other gods or some kind of magic on your side to help you fight the gods that were trying to enforce laws on you. But the way that this book seems to think
58:13
that like if you prove the laws are, like you said, being enacted under false pretenses, that would somehow fix
58:20
anything, I think is a sort of a misunderstanding of how all of this works. Like its own cosmology
58:26
um doesn't really hold together super well. But in any case, I don't know. They need to find the They need to find
58:32
the sword. That's the sword. They're trying to get the sword from a cave. Um, it's kind of like the story.
58:39
It's very heroes journey. They're going into the cave to get the thing. So, having established that,

58:46
would you like to guess what they do next? Andrew, our heroes redouble their efforts and
58:51
there's a scene transition where maybe we have a moment for RA to talk more
58:57
about her special interest of history and try to, you know, put these two
59:02
conflicting stories together, kind of like how we were doing just now, and maybe question now that she's right here
59:08
at the foothills of the Knicks Mountains presumably, she should think to herself,
59:13
is this really going to save anything? When I was fighting with the Arctura Verina, I was yelling about how the
59:21
Scorpio code was a lie, and there were civilians within earshot, but none of them seemed to take me seriously. Is a
59:28
magic sword going to be enough to to convince people that what I'm saying is
59:33
true if they won't even hear me in the first place? Maybe she's thinking like, the Scorpio code is fascistic, sure, but it only
59:40
affects Scorpios. And if you try to take down the Scorpio Stellarium, you're destabilizing an entire 12th of the
59:47
government. So maybe on balance, abolishing the Scorpio code is a bad thing because what if it leads to civil
59:53
war that causes millions of people to die? I mean, I wouldn't agree with that conclusion myself, but it would be
59:59
something that Ra might reasonably be thinking at this stage. Um, yeah. Yeah, it's worth thinking about.
1:00:05
It's worth thinking about. So instead of thinking about it, what she does is go to sleep and have a dream.
1:00:11
where she remembers a Scorpio cop among other things in a protracted combat sequence forcing Nara to use her own
1:00:19
zodiac turning on herself which I guess no I don't guess I know it erases her
1:00:25
memory although I don't know why it does that you have any insight on that per
1:00:32
chance mayaps I thought it was a separate magic power
1:00:37
or maybe through zodiac turning They found a star sign where like an obscure
1:00:43
power was memory eraser. It had something to do with dream walking and
1:00:49
there was some cocktail of magical powers that came together. The system
1:00:54

so I guess the answer is no. I have no idea what happened. The systems of this magic seem a little
1:00:59
bit unclear in this moment. But Nara has to use Zodiac turning on herself and or also erase her memory uh
1:01:06
so that she and Ra can no longer team up and be cool action heroes anymore. Ra
1:01:12
wakes up. This uh freaks her out this nightmare which causes her to sort of like misfire her own zodiac turning and
1:01:19
she hits Chase with it, changing his sign and cutting off his ability to use
1:01:25
Libra and healing because suddenly he's not a Libra anymore. Wow. This is This is huge. This could
1:01:31
cause Chase to very reasonably be very upset with Ra, create this huge rift in
1:01:37
their friendship. I'm sure Chase is going to care a lot about this. Mhm. Even if Chase, you know, Chase is a
1:01:43
really nice guy. Even if Chase eventually after a appropriate time of being a little bit upset comes to terms
1:01:50
with it, uh it will have a a very outplaced level of importance with our
1:01:55
team dynamic because now we don't have a healer. So, um, that's actually really close because what happens is we spend
1:02:02
an entire chapter having every party member individually assure Ra that changing Chase's sign was in no way her
1:02:09
fault. She cannot be held remotely responsible, even a tiny bit, even to suggest it would be to to act in pure
1:02:15
foolishness. Um, and they remind her how much they love her and care about her because of how the main character she is.
1:02:22
And it also turns out um that she made Chase a Zodiac turner, which is cool. Um, He'll reckon with the emotional
1:02:28
implications of that later, probably. I guess maybe if we get around to it. Um, and then they try to change Chase's sign
1:02:35
back. But guess what? Ra's magic misfires again, sort of doing something
1:02:42
to Ka. And then everybody has another round of patting Ra on the back and
1:02:48
reminding her what a wonderful small little bean she is and how no wrong can be done by her immaculate hand.
1:02:57
You're right. I'm so sorry. I completely misremembered that. For some reason, I thought there would be consequences.
1:03:04

No, you silly goose. Uh, the consequences come next. When they
1:03:09
finally make it out of the cave, they've wandered through these ruins. Now they're at the other entrance to the
1:03:14
cave. Uh, good thing there was one of those, I suppose. And they're immediately kidnapped by
1:03:19
some despite being in assiduous. Did I get
1:03:25
that right? Yes. They were both a words, so you're you got a 50/50 shot.
1:03:30
Okay. If I'm wrong, somebody let me know in the comments. I'm sure you will, please. Um, these Otarins are led by a woman
1:03:37
named Sora, and they tell the group, they kidnap them, tie them up, whatever.
1:03:42
Um, but then like they have a conversation and it's clear they're on the same side, so they kind of become buddy buddy. And they tell the group
1:03:48
that, "Oh, Ka is a spirit walker. That's that thing you just activated in her, which is the third and final arch power.
1:03:55
This one is like kind of sort of secret or something. Um, but Ka has it. And
1:04:00
then there's like a little throwaway gag about Aia being the only one that doesn't have an arch power and she's like, I'm grumpy about this. She's the
1:04:07
Saka. Yeah, she is the Saka of the group. So, they all decide to team up against the Scorpios. Uh, since the Atarans were
1:04:13
protecting the Collelexus this whole time, they might as well team up, right? It's like whatever, right? So then, okay, Andrew, you've
1:04:21
you've had two strikes so far, but would you like to guess what they do now that
1:04:27
they have allied with a group of people who are in possession of the very thing that they themselves seek?
1:04:32
Okay. You know, I think I've learned my lesson after two rounds of this. So, I'm I'm I'm not going to do my bit. I'm
1:04:39
going to actually tell you what I think happens. I I read this book, but what I think happens. Um, I think that now that
1:04:47
they know where the mountain is and in the cave somewhere, not worth
1:04:52
summarizing, Chase used his Driscoll reading abilities to get literal actual
1:04:58
coordinates. Someone carved computer coordinates on on the stone, which I
1:05:03
guess makes sense for a dystopian thing. But anyways, we know where it is. We know what needs to be done. Um, this is
1:05:09
a great time for a gearing up montage since this Sora is so uh is so

1:05:16
intelligent. She probably knows a lot about these arch powers, at least enough to kind of get our three heroes going.
1:05:22
We're going to see some training. We're going to see maybe some reconciliation
1:05:27
between Chase and Ra after the whole like changing your star sign out from under you thing. And all of our heroes
1:05:35
are going to band together, climb that mountain for one final assault, and get
1:05:40
that sword. Oh, okay. Great. Well, I guess I don't have to do the rest of the book then.
1:05:46
No, I'm just kidding. Uh, they go to sleep. [Laughter]
1:05:52
It's terrible. So, they hit the head. You got to get your shut eyee. You got to get your shut eyee to climb the
1:05:58
mountain or go in the mountain. Not climb it, I guess. Listen, Andrew, you said you wanted them to like, I don't know, gear up or whatever. They need to
1:06:05
sleep if they're going to gear up. Okay. They can't climb the mountain tired. They can't climb the mountain on an
1:06:10
empty stomach, which is why they have to have an extended dinner scene at a quote unquote noodle restaurant in a minute.
1:06:16
Yes. At a restaurant. But anyway, uh they take a nap, Ra has some dream, blah
1:06:22
blah blah, nar blah blah blah. Safety. Uh, Ra wakes up and this also wakes Kaia
1:06:30
up and Kaia realizes that she can see people's emotions as auras now, which I guess is part of spirit walking and
1:06:37
she's also allegedly more sensitive to other people's emotions generally. They have a little talk about N. And then
1:06:44
Chase, who is also there at some point, he turns to the camera and he goes, "Wow, isn't it like mega ironic how the
1:06:51
Scorpio cops are using a former loved one on you, Ra, because you tried to
1:06:56
break the law about not loving people? Isn't that a fantastic example of irony?
1:07:02
The literary device that's included in most forms of successful fiction? It's pretty ironic, wouldn't you say? I I
1:07:09
mean, if this was some kind of story, that would be like a really smart thing to include that like a good writer uh
1:07:15
would put in their book and everyone's like, "Yeah, Chase,
1:07:20
that's a a good point. Um, thanks for contributing that to the conversation." Chase is so smart.
1:07:27

So, then they go meet up with Sora, who I don't even know how to summarize this scene, dog. They meet up with Sora and
1:07:34
she takes them to a chamber that seems custom built for showing people propaganda exposition
1:07:42
paintings that also move with magic. So, it's like a dome and they lay on their
1:07:48
backs and Sora can basically make these cave drawings, rearrange themselves to
1:07:53
tell them the whole history of all that [ __ ] that happened with the Collelexus.
1:07:59
You'd think that this would be, if a little bit boring, then at least informative about, you know, what's
1:08:06
going on, who any of these people are, what's what we're supposed to be taking from this. But I personally, uh, my
1:08:13
brain melted out of my skull when I was reading this. I was so bored. It goes on
1:08:20
for so long and the whole thing is plagued by this bizarre uncertainty that
1:08:26
the book doesn't even seem to realize is there because we are meant to take this
1:08:31
all this stuff that Sora is showing us as literal fact. But we can't forget that Sora as as as
1:08:40
nice of a person as she is, she is a political actor on one side of a
1:08:45
centuries old conflict. And there is no sense at any point that the book wants
1:08:51
us to even question what it is that she is showing us. Despite the fact that we will learn very shortly, she's
1:08:57
personally been involved in some of these events because she herself is extremely ancient.
1:09:03
No, no, no, no, no. What she showed us isn't like her point of view. It's not her memory. This is just literally what
1:09:09
happened. So like deal with it. Yeah. I don't see anything wrong with that. Just shut up and consume product.
1:09:15
Exactly. accept narrative for what they say, right? We can't trust this stellarium,
1:09:21
but we can trust random lady in the mountains. There's just bad apples that spoil the
1:09:27
bunch. And ain't that just the way? And as the book summarizes this little scene, it is truly a quote deeply complex fight
1:09:35
between love, hate, and legacy. Yeah, sounds sounds right to me. I don't
1:09:41
know. So Ra um as she's walking out of the theater I guess into that like
1:09:47
uncomfortable 4:30 after a afternoon movie sunset that's like somehow too
1:09:52

bright and too dark and like it throws off the whole vibe of the day cuz you are thinking about how you like have school tomorrow and stuff but also like
1:09:59
you're still thinking about the movie that you enjoyed. She walks out into that and she's like, "Oh, wow. That vision really answered quote all of her
1:10:06
questions about history. Questions to which we, the readers, have never and
1:10:12
will never have access." And then Sora is like, "Um, yeah. So glad that you
1:10:18
enjoyed it, Ra." And then they all go away for a bit. They just sort of like
1:10:24
split up. Um, they meander. They go away. They just sort of meander into the
1:10:30
woods to clear their heads or something and they're attacked by a creature. Not
1:10:35
everybody is there. It's uh Ra is there and Chase is there, but I'm pretty sure
1:10:41
Ka and Aia are not there and Sora is definitely not there. They're not there. Um, right.
1:10:46
So, so they go into the woods, they're attacked by this creature. And the way that this scene plays out is like they
1:10:54
come across it and they turn to look at each other and then the creature roars dramatically like it's a boss
1:11:01
transitioning from a cut scene into the actual fight and then it lunges at them like the way that it's the way that it's
1:11:08
structured narratively is so delightful. Is this the anisodectilic
1:11:14
creature or is that the is that the next one? I think that's the next one, but I didn't actually make note of that,
1:11:19
unfortunately. It may or may not be anisodactyl, some some kind of dactillic. That did not is
1:11:26
not a word that I think a lot of people know if you don't know a lot about foot structure of various creatures. It's
1:11:31
intermittently referred to as a wyvern and a dragon. And normally, I don't really care about the distinction. I I I
1:11:38
don't care like what the empirical definition of those creatures are, but I know that a wyvern is not a dragon or a
1:11:46
dragon is not a wyvern. Like a rectangle square kind of thing. Yeah, I'm with you. It's just it feels
1:11:51
inconsistent. Um you can redefine these terms however you want within your own narrative universe, but you got to keep it keep it
1:11:57
straight. So they fight it. Um and as they're losing, Nara shows up and like helps them fight it basically. But then
1:12:04

Yeah. Whoa. Super kills a dragon. Whoa. Yeah. She knocks Chase out um and erases
1:12:09
his short-term memory of this fight for some reason. I I was never clear on why she did this, but but she did.
1:12:15
Um and then she reveals to Ra that Chase is her brother
1:12:21
and that their dad is Silus Merik. So the guy that they met very briefly in
1:12:29
the cabin in the woods right before they like properly left the hub area is Silas
1:12:34
Merik. the guy who was immortal thanks to the or is immortal thanks to the
1:12:40
colleus that he stole the the Pokemon guy the the the guy in Little Root Town or Little Root Woods.
1:12:46
And I thought it was interesting that she's like Chase cannot learn this. Chase cannot know this under any
1:12:53
circumstances. Don't ask why. Just do not do not do not let Chase find this
1:12:59
out. Uh, which would make you think that there would be consequences of some sort when Chase eventually finds out. But
1:13:07
you keep thinking that. We'll let you think that for as long as you want. She also drops like a whole bunch of
1:13:13
other lore that um I'm not going to include because it doesn't it doesn't really matter. It's untransformative. You could say
1:13:18
no. What she does reveal is that Blaine, the guy who created the Scorpio code, is
1:13:24
RA's actual father. So, we knew that the the guy that Ra lives with
1:13:29
So, we knew that Aia's dad was not Ra's dad, but now we know her dad is the Scorpio Code guy,
1:13:35
right? This is so crazy because she hates the Scorpio code and now her
1:13:40
father is the arbiter of her every misfortune. So, I really truly don't get this. Like
1:13:46
I know that like for some people that these like family ties related themes like really hit, but this for me does
1:13:53
not materially alter the stakes in like any way, right? Because
1:13:58
no, the code the code is evil, right? Like if my dad if I found out that my real dad was Professor Jonathan Genocide, the
1:14:06
inventor of genocide, I would not suddenly develop like really complicated, nuanced feelings about
1:14:13
genocide. like it would still be genocide. And if anything, if anything, I might feel uniquely responsible and

1:14:20
uniquely placed to undo this. So, it might galvanize my feelings because I'm
1:14:25
so close to it. I can fix this wrong that was put in place by my own blood,
1:14:31
which in the context of a novel could be read as some kind of metaphor for the
1:14:36
responsibility andor opportunity that younger generations have in the face of older generations mistakes.
1:14:43
Yes. Is that a reasonable read? Well, yes. I think that's a reasonable read. I This This was something I was
1:14:50
saving for later. Um I at 2 a.m. wrote this stupid note in my nook that uh said
1:14:57
paintings on a wall versus Darth Vader. And I had no idea what I was talking
1:15:02
about until probably you articulated this in this moment because like if it
1:15:07
were Ra's stepdad who raised her that was Jonathan genocide that might hold a
1:15:14
little bit more weight to me but like we don't know anything about Blaine other than these myths. Ra certainly has no
1:15:22
relationship to him. There's no indication that Ra's mom her biological
1:15:27
mother who did raise her. In fact, uh later on there's going to be a very callous uh implication by Aia that Ra's
1:15:36
conception was not consensual, which I I just found very tasteless. And it it it
1:15:42
goes to show you the gaping hole with this relationship. So, while I do agree with you that it really doesn't make a
1:15:48
difference to learn that your dad is Jonathan genocide or whatever, it's still like this is still probably the
1:15:54
worst way to do it because it's things that actually have touched the narrative versus people we've heard about in the
1:16:01
trippy like mural one time. It's literally like my dead grandmother is not actually dead, but also not only
1:16:09
is she not dead, she is the main villain. And not only is she the main villain, but she's a necromancer. Like
1:16:14
I've never known this person, but now she's now abandoned necromancer and she wants to kill me. Right.
1:16:20
Okay. At least at least we got to this point in one book versus three books. I'm a lot less mad right now because I didn't
1:16:26
spend three books getting to this point. I was also less mad because I was like, well, at least I know that this is a

1:16:32
thing that happens now. Like I'm not wounded like it's the first time anymore, you know? I' I've had my heart broken already at this point,
1:16:38
right? So, it's at this point that Ra notices that N is wearing some kind of weird
1:16:44
necklace and she rips it off, which causes Na just takes it. Yeah. Which just causes Na to not be
1:16:51
memory erased and evil anymore. Like now she's like, "Oh my god, I'm back to normal. Thanks for fixing that."
1:16:59
This This is the first time we see the necklace, by the way. This is the first time we see the necklace. Maybe there's some kind of
1:17:04
parallelism allegedly happening here because Ra this whole time has also been wearing a necklace that turns into a sword. I didn't mention it because it
1:17:10
doesn't matter. Um, no, it does not matter. But like I cannot imagine that that was intentional. They are just two magic
1:17:16
necklaces. So, they concoct this little plan where Nar's like, "I'm going to go back to the Scorpios and tell them I
1:17:22
couldn't find you, and that'll hopefully delay their plot long enough for you to get the Collelexus." Meanwhile,
1:17:29
and they're not going to check that I'm wearing the mind control necklace that is pivotal to their mission. But then
1:17:35
they do check offcreen and they don't immediately kill her, which
1:17:40
they thought she they would do if she did not have the necklace on. So it's like it's like
1:17:45
moot on multiple levels, right? It's m mutually assured destruction.
1:17:55
That's good. Ra feels like really guilty that she isn't telling Chase about all that
1:18:00
stuff. Um, and the framing of this makes it seem like the book wants us to think
1:18:06
that Ra is the victim here because she's like having to lie, like she has no choice but not to tell Chase what she
1:18:13
knows. Um, and we're supposed to feel really bad for her for that. We're so bad. Um, because allegedly this would destroy
1:18:19
Chase psychologically or something if he knew. I'm sure that that will pay off allegedly.
1:18:25
So then they go to dinner which they call supper. Midwesterner spotted and
1:18:30
everyone talks really really formally about nothing at all. Sora is out there
1:18:36
saying [ __ ] like history and ancient magic coincide which sound like an ad
1:18:41

that I would have seen for like I don't know the Museum of Natural History in Vienna on the train. Um not like a way a
1:18:48
person talks. So then they go to bed, which is awesome because if they're
1:18:54
going to climb this mountain by golly gosh, they need some [ __ ] Z's.
1:19:00
But before they do that, Ra decides to have that Jedi training montage that you alluded to earlier,
1:19:07
Andrew, so you weren't totally off there. She runs into Chase on the way, and they have this brief discussion about a
1:19:14
budding relationship between him and Aia that's been happening offcreen for the entire book. Like apparently they're in
1:19:20
a relationship now. So conversation about that over. Ra goes to do her
1:19:26
training which Sora then interrupts to remind her for the golly g drillionth
1:19:32
time how special she is and how she'd be kinder to herself and she shouldn't be up training so early and like life is
1:19:39
real hard for small little beans like you. You got to be kinder. Um and she's
1:19:44
like here let me help you with something. So she takes Ra to this pond
1:19:50
that exists explicitly to dispense magic symbolism flowers to Zodiac Turners who
1:19:56
are about to undergo major life changes. Ra picks out a red lily or something. It
1:20:03
doesn't really matter. And there's more info dumping about the backstory involving Sora's relationship to the
1:20:10
whole drama with the Merics and the Collelexus. And then Atlas Fulbright, who we last saw in the
1:20:19
hub many, many, many miles away, many weeks of travel. Yeah.
1:20:24
Walks into the room and Ra is like, "How did you get here?" And he says,
1:20:30
"Arcturas get special privileges." And then they move on.
1:20:37
Well, I I just kind of assumed that he could like teleport or something, you know? I guess he can teleport, but he
1:20:43
can't teleport other people. Other people because well, even if he could, I it would be directly helping.
1:20:49
So, I I'm okay with that cop out that they did. I'm that doesn't change it for me. Okay, I won't fight you on it. Um, so he
1:20:55
tells them that N is on her way to claim the colleus after all. Apparently, even though the mind control spell is broken,

1:21:01
she's still obeying them because now they're going to use her dad as blackmail. So, I guess they're like
1:21:07
threatening to kill him or something, right? So, they get the gang together, that is, you know, Chase, Ra, Ka, and
1:21:14
Aia, and they decide they're finally going to go down into these caves and get this sword before N. Um, along the
1:21:21
way, they decide that they will just go ahead and tell Chase about his dad. And
1:21:28
he's like, "Okay, cool. Thanks for letting me know. We can circle back to
1:21:33
this later." Um, that's weird, I suppose. Yeah. I mean, he's not like he's not
1:21:40
totally happy to hear this, but he's not also like doing anything. And then it's
1:21:46
completely undercut when Aia is like, "Huh, that makes sense. N's hot and
1:21:52
Chase is hot, too." So, that totally means that they're related. Must be related cuz they're both hot.
1:21:58
Cuz I find them both attractive. They then enter what can only be described as a boss chamber from a Dark
1:22:05
Souls game. It is literally a dome-shaped room in an otherwise normal cave whose entrance is obscured by
1:22:12
actual fog. So they enter this room and there is the sword
1:22:18
to pass through the barrier. It's right there. The sword is just there. So they pick it up.
1:22:23
It triggers a boss fight because of course it did. It's in a giant dome-shaped chamber in the heart of a
1:22:29
mountain. It's some kind of chimera thing. It's a bunch of animals mashed together. The
1:22:35
fight's really long, blah blah blah blah blah. People are hurt. Ra does
1:22:40
eventually win. She's knocked out and she enters some kind of dying dream purgatory where
1:22:48
she's seeing all kinds of visions and she talks to her dad, but then it's fine. She wakes back up. Chase is
1:22:54
healing her, but then oh my god, the creature wakes up too and it attacks for a second time. Phase shift.
1:23:01
It's phase two. Yeah. just in time for N to um sweep in for the rescue. She uses
1:23:08
healing magic that she also has, I guess, from being Zodiac turned earlier. I don't know if that's stated
1:23:14
explicitly. Um but she's able to use this to me healing magic on the creature which it

1:23:20
recognizes because it has some connection to some historical person that was mentioned earlier.
1:23:25
Matias Matias Merrick. It has it has connection to Matias Merrick. recognizes that the healing magic that runs in that bloodline
1:23:31
because apparently magic types are also kind of like a fingerprint like your
1:23:37
healing magic would be slightly different from my healing magic. So, it recognizes the healing magic
1:23:42
and it thinks for a moment that she is Matias and it stops attacking. I really like that. I really like that
1:23:48
interpretation. And I hope you're right because I really thought it was just a complete contradiction that that certain
1:23:54
powers are genetic and whereas every other kind of power is determined by star sign. But I like I like what you're
1:24:00
saying. I hope I hope that was Audrey's intention. Uh I thought that it was that wasn't me trying to interpret anything. I thought
1:24:06
that was what they were saying. Okay. Thank god. Thank god. Good. Good. Thumbs up. Ka has Chase cut his palm and
1:24:14
she also cuts her palm and they mingle their blood together because
1:24:19
right in this moment we are getting some kind of exposition about how like you can mingle people's blood to seal some
1:24:27
kind of arch power spell thing and they mingle the blood and it triggers a bunch of particle
1:24:33
effects and [ __ ] and then the creature becomes friendly forever now. It's not just temporarily assuaged by the healing
1:24:41
magic. It's like become a friendly. That's nice. This is the moment that the book chooses to info dump about the group's family
1:24:47
history. Fully catch chase up. We get everybody who wasn't in all the previous conversations on the same page about who
1:24:52
is related to a lot of this is information that we've learned before and we don't really get interesting reactions from the
1:24:58
characters involved. Yeah. It's literally just repeating stuff so that so that we all know that
1:25:03
all the characters have all the same information. There's this moment where for a second it seems like N might turn
1:25:09
on them again and be like, you know, my dad is still uh uh his life is in danger, so I do actually need the
1:25:14

colleus. But then they managed to talk her out of it and they all leave the cave fine. Basically, as well as they
1:25:21
went into it, but this time they do actually have the colleus. Okay. So then
1:25:27
they take a nap. But after they take a nap,
1:25:32
but after they take a nap, they start talking about what they are going to do to take down the Stellarium now that
1:25:38
they have the colleus, which again will somehow prove all history is a lie and
1:25:44
everyone will be so immediately convinced by this that they will turn on the government and justice will reign
1:25:51
for a thousand dynasties. Amen. Amen. There are some conversations, many
1:25:57
conversations, too many conversations perhaps between various permutations of our main cast. Conversations that take place offcreen
1:26:04
in a restaurant that our heroes are not invited to because it's only for the
1:26:09
grown-ups. NA reconcile. They kiss several times.
1:26:15
And we leave the book with the actual core conflict that being getting rid of
1:26:21
this whole Scorpio code thing deferred to another future hypothetical novel
1:26:27
which will contain all of the things that this novel was supposedly going to contain. But instead, we got this random
1:26:33
scavenger hunted. But, you know, that's it's pretty good for a novel written by a 10-year-old, I guess. The end. Well, I
1:26:41
think you're being so uncharitable with that, though, because obviously this is gearing itself up for a a trilogy. Like,
1:26:48
blowing up the Death Star in the first Star Wars didn't bring down the Empire. Like, their only goal stated from the
1:26:55
outset was finding the Collelexus. They found the Collelexus. That's the triumph. There's going to be a tragic
1:27:01
moment in the second book. And in the third book, there's going to be a transcendence when they actually do
1:27:06
bring down the Scorpio Stellarium once and for all. I I didn't have I just don't buy it.
1:27:12
Okay. I didn't I don't buy it because they didn't blow up the Death Star in this. They got the sword. They got to the point. They got to the
1:27:18
point where they decided to start talking about maybe blowing up that whole Death Star thing. Okay, I see what you're saying. They
1:27:25

don't use the sword for anything, but they found it. you know, they got the damn thing. Because, of course, disassembling the
1:27:31
Scorpio Stellarium won't actually solve the problem they think it's going to solve. That should have been how book one ended. They take down the
1:27:37
Stellarium, and then in book two, they realize, uh-oh, now there's a power vacuum. A whole bunch of new factions
1:27:43
come in and try to split up the continent in new ways. All the You save that for your suggestions cuz I don't know if I
1:27:49
necessarily agree with that. But um yeah, thanks for that because I I don't
1:27:54
think I could have delivered that uh summary. This book gives you a headache to read and and
1:28:01
passes by both glacially and way too fast. I thought I was going crazy
1:28:07
because as Jay illustrated in their summary, there are multiple times where like the characters stop everything just
1:28:14
to be like, "It's okay, Ra. You're a good person and we still like you." like
1:28:19
it happens at least twice, if not more, the exact same like therapy language
1:28:25
over and over. But um yeah, so um unfortunately I don't think either Jay
1:28:30
and I can be contrarian here. This is absolutely feels like it's been written
1:28:36
by a 12-year-old. We'll talk more about what that literally means as we go along. And I I know that if Audrey were
1:28:43
here, she would be saying something about like, "Oh, I've had XYZ editors that worked on the Hunger Games." I
1:28:48
don't believe you. I do not believe you. I'm sorry. Like I either you didn't listen to them or you're you didn't
1:28:55
actually have that many real editors because this book uh it needs a lot. It needs a lot and it needs less than some
1:29:02
people seem to believe. So, I'm excited to really pick this apart with you, Jay. Yeah, it is a bummer that it wasn't like
1:29:08
kind of a sleeper hit or good in some secret way that people who only read the first couple chapters didn't see. Uh it
1:29:15
really needs work. So, let's let's make that work happen. Let's do it. [Music]
Good things
1:29:22
N pushed me to the ground, catching my weight as we collapsed into the dry snow with her hands on my upper back,
1:29:29

shifting to my shoulders. Everything in me was screaming out, yearning for her to kiss me again.
1:29:35
"Did you ever fall out of love?" she asked, leaning her face closer to
1:29:41
mine. "Or are you falling in love a second time?" A little bit of both. I think
1:29:47
I'd say the same. She whisked my hair away from my face. We are going to do everything we can to
1:29:54
reverse that damn code. She kissed me a second time. My magic
1:30:00
jumper. Yeah. My magic jumped to life underneath the
1:30:05
moonlight, illuminating her body and my own in an ancient dance of blood and storm, of balance and unity, of the
1:30:13
equal forces of change and fate. Within me stirred the calling of stories old
1:30:19
and new to glow. What? Within me stirred the calling of stories old and new to
1:30:25
glow as if there were stars hidden in every part of my skin. I was made of a
1:30:31
universal truth of love and war. And I knew with this force of fighting and
1:30:37
fury and fire, nothing would stop me from tearing the Scorpio code apart with
1:30:42
my bare hands and sharpened claws.
1:30:48
God, it doesn't mean anything. Sure it does. No, she's
1:30:54
her resolve is galvanized by the rediscovery of her love and they had
1:30:59
been victimized by the Scorpio Stellarium. So now they've redoubled in their efforts to to bring justice to the
1:31:07
world. It makes perfect sense to me. Yeah, but that's that's not what she actually communicated. That's the vibe
1:31:14
that you understand because you're familiar with how narrative fiction works. None. None of my magic jumped to
1:31:21
life underneath the moonlight, illuminating her body and my own in an ancient dance of okay. Then we have all
1:31:27
these dichotoies. Blood and storm, balance and unity, which are kind of the same.
1:31:33
Equal forces of change and fate. I don't even know what that means. Those are
1:31:39
stirring, calling old stories and new to glow as if they were stars under her
1:31:45
skin. None of that communicates anything like what you just said. Well, leave it to the poetry MFA to not
1:31:52

understand subtext. I mean, like, why is this so obvious to me and you're so obsinate about this? I think I think
1:31:58
there's something wrong with you. I think it's because you know how stories are supposed to and you're
1:32:04
allowing this one to homeopathically influence by suggestion.
1:32:12
Whatever. Well, Jay, if you wanted to be so down
1:32:18
on the ending, how about you get up for a second and tell me some good things about this book. I will get up. I will
1:32:24
get up and say this before anything else. Hello, Audra. Thank you for joining us from the intro. I hope you
1:32:29
did skip over at least until later. I think that you will notice in my positive feedback that a lot of the
1:32:36
things that I liked or that I thought were effective were were small. And that
1:32:41
is not meant to indicate that I hated all of the big stuff or even that all of
1:32:46
the big stuff is unfixable. What it means is that wellescribed sensations,
1:32:53
brief character interactions, and incidental worldbuilding elements all
1:32:58
make this world feel more lived in, uh, more literary, more evocative than all
1:33:06
of this broader international conflict stuff.
1:33:11
Um, you can still have that. by all means include it if you feel so moved,
1:33:17
but just know that I think it's really the bedrock of good fiction, these these
1:33:24
smaller momentto- moment engaging things that keep a reader attentive um that you
1:33:30
need to work on mastering first. Clearly, you have a lot of big ideas about what it means to build out a whole
1:33:37
world. I've I've said politically, but not just politically, also geographically and in terms of the
1:33:42
magic. But I think that if the reading of the novel is not transportive, if the
1:33:47
characters don't feel human, the world doesn't feel like it's full of sensory
1:33:52
things to experience, people are going to turn off. Um, they might still read it because
1:33:58
there are people out there who read to turn off. Um, but I have a sense that those are not the readers that you are
1:34:03
trying to attract here. So, if you do notice that I at least am mostly bringing up little incidental things and
1:34:09

not talking so much about like how cool Zodiac turning is, um, now you know why.
1:34:15
So, with all of that hemming and hawing out of the way, I'll actually start with my, uh, first positive thing, which is I
1:34:23
thought it was really funny whenever characters used the phrase breaking the code as euphemism for gay sex. They use
1:34:29
it as euphemisms for non-gay sex as well, but it just so happens that most of the characters in this story are gay.
1:34:36
So, they're like, "Ah, they're breaking the code." And that made me smile. Like, that's cute. It makes sense in world.
1:34:42
And I don't know. I get it. I like it. Yeah. That that highlights a really big opportunity for more like idiosyncratic
1:34:49
ways of speaking, like slang stuff, things that make a dystopian world feel
1:34:54
fun and quotable. Uh because now I'm definitely going to be using that anytime I'm aware of any colonel
1:35:00
encounters breaking the code, the bro code if you will.
1:35:05
I won't. Um I also want to him and haw and say that it's interesting to me that you called out a lot of your good things
1:35:11
are small because we may have opposite philosophies on this book. A lot of my
1:35:19
good things are probably backhanded, but they're very big, ephemeral things that
1:35:25
if leveraged intentionally, I think could be very, very strong. Um, and I've
1:35:31
alluded to this already before, but a big thing that I want to call out is I love that every character that these
1:35:38
kids meet is smarter than them, is ahead of them, is stronger than them. I was I
1:35:46
was so put off by the beginning of this book. I hated the the inciting incident festival. It felt like a boy scout camp.
1:35:53
It just it did not work for me. I hated all the proper nouns. I still don't
1:35:58
understand how the countries all fit together. But when they stumbled around
1:36:05
in that blizzard, as stupid as it was, and Atlas Fullbrite is like, "Hey, I am
1:36:10
this crazy powerful man, and your success is very valuable to me, but I
1:36:15
can't really do anything but indirectly influence you, but a lot of other people
1:36:20
are willing to directly kill you." I was like, "Holy [ __ ] this is a story." And
1:36:26
even Kaa, you know, she comes across Ka and there's a lot of weight placed on

1:36:31
her her maturity, her emotional determination or I can't remember
1:36:37
exactly what Ra admires in one of those Undertale words. One of those Undertale words.
1:36:43
Um, and then obviously you have Sora and her stupid mosaic. Uh, it's it's a very
1:36:50
like classic fairy tale or like the Hobbit or whatever. like these are these are small weak characters and everything
1:36:58
that is going on around them is way above their heads. Like that's that's cool. And I think leaning into that is
1:37:05
going to be a night and day difference in how much I care about the rest of the book. Yeah, leveraging that very real, very
1:37:12
felt power dynamic is exciting conceptually. One other um I guess this
1:37:18
is a bit broader thing that I thought was was at least interesting was I know we're going to talk more about RA's
1:37:25
neurode divergence later but I wanted to call it out now partly as foreshadowing but also to say that the way that the
1:37:31
Scorpio code forces her to affect flat speech yes is kind of like masking but in reverse
1:37:39
right like instead of being forced society to be expressive in a particular
1:37:46
particular way. She's instead being forced to be muted. And I want more of this to be included a
1:37:54
and b to really matter. Like I want this policing of neurode divergent people's
1:38:00
body language and speech to be invoked and I want it to feel uncomfortable and
1:38:05
I want the novel to develop it into something thematic. It's a really interesting idea, but right now it's just kind of being dropped in.
1:38:12
Yes, that is so funny. That is so funny cuz that was literally my second point is Scorpio code is masking. Uh I I agree
1:38:20
that this is one of the most interesting aspects of the story and I think the
1:38:25
seedlings of what you're saying are there. I think that was Audrey's intent because there are all these moments
1:38:32
seemingly at random where the Scorpio code haunts Ra and there are people who
1:38:37
have different levels of of fervor. It it feels almost like like a religion or
1:38:43
a creed where you know it it just kind of depends on the person the level of like zealatry that they have for it. Um
1:38:50

this is technically a suggestion but just to kind of add on to the masking thing. Uh this is where you can leverage
1:38:58
something that I hate hate hate hate about your dialogue right now which is that when when Ra is using her more
1:39:05
formal speech, she misuses words. And this book misuses words all the time,
1:39:11
but like she says something like I think off an off the cuff example is like uh I apologize for my missspeak
1:39:18
which is just not not good not good sentence. It's a malipropism which is so
1:39:25
it undercuts what's trying to be achieved by that sentence. But but Jay forget like neurode
1:39:31
divergent masking. There's all kinds of masking like like in corporate America, you have to change your behaviors to fit
1:39:37
in. And like we saw, I could not use business words off the top of my head. I
1:39:43
don't fit in very well in that kind of environment. So if the malipropisms were kept exactly the same in RA's formal
1:39:51
dialogue and we had mentions of her like cringing at herself for misusing these
1:39:57
words just a a moment too late. I think that would really heighten the fact that
1:40:02
Ra just feels like a fish out of water and that this society and this foundation of her culture doesn't mesh
1:40:10
naturally with her. And this is also technically a suggestion, but I just have to throw it in here because it's
1:40:15
too perfect not to. This is also why the Scorpio code needs to be actually
1:40:20
strictly enforced all the time and we need to feel the threat of it. So that when Yeah. So that when RA has a
1:40:28
malipropism moment, when she cringes at it, she's like, "Oh [ __ ] I really could get in trouble for
1:40:34
letting the mask slip here." In the current version of this world, there are plenty of instances where she lets the
1:40:39
code go, doesn't even seem to be thinking about using it, and gets away with it, even though allegedly the
1:40:46
punishment for breaking it is death, or at least really, really severe some kind of other punishment. We need that threat
1:40:53
to be there. I think you're taking a step too far in where you're drawing the line. Um, with the Scorpio code and the threat that
1:41:00

hangs over her, you mentioned that she doesn't even think about it. That's where I think that you should stop. I I
1:41:06
love the fact that everyone is so hypocritical about their codes. Like
1:41:11
think about real life religions, real life gangs, cults, uh omera in the
1:41:18
mafia. Like people will kill you over these rules that are just made up. But a
1:41:24
lot of people are completely indifferent to it. And even the people doing the killing will violate these rules. And I
1:41:31
think that yes, she should constantly be aware of the threat of death, but I I love the fact that like some of the
1:41:38
Scorpio Stellarium show emotion when they're like in a life or death fight. Like I I think that if this were
1:41:45
intentional and you were highlighting something about the hypocrisy of very rigid rules and power structures, this
1:41:52
would elevate the narrative even with the same constituent parts of what you have now. It's the intentionality in
1:41:57
every turn. I think we actually agree then because what I was trying to suggest was not that like she must
1:42:04
follow it all the time and anytime she follows it must it be met with like immediate swift and severe punishment.
1:42:12
What I meant was that like if she's going to be breaking it. What I mean was that of course people
1:42:18
who are like higher up on the totem pole than her can break it and get away with it, right? Because it is ultimately like a human
1:42:24
method of control. Yeah. Law system. It is ultimately a human system of governments
1:42:30
run and enforced by humans who are flawed. But if people are going to get away with it, I think it should be
1:42:36
people who are higher up who don't have somebody above them to immediately punish them. It shouldn't be Ra who is a
1:42:41
nobody who is a wanted criminal as well. Um I think that she needs to know that
1:42:48
if she breaks it, she's going to get punished. And that's when we can have moments where she realizes maybe for
1:42:55
example at the ceremony she's being sworn into this this government and at the same time as she's being sworn in
1:43:01
she's witnessing Scorpios who have more authority than her break the code and she knows that she can't call them out

1:43:06
on it because she doesn't have the authority to do so. So we have this moment where she learns that bureaucracy exists and is hypocritical. Um, but I
1:43:13
think that the code should apply to her. And I agree with you as well that maybe there are people in the citizenry in the
1:43:20
ley who don't care so much about the code and are like, "Oh, Ra, you know, let your guard down around me. It's
1:43:25
totally fine." But then there should likewise be analogues to those people who are like, "How dare you? This is the
1:43:31
code of God. You need to keep this up. And if you don't, I will report you to the police and you will be killed. And
1:43:37
that is just because God made it that way." if this is going to be a feature of society, I want to see all those
1:43:44
different permutations of how it would play out in real minds and behaviors.
1:43:49
And there's definitely room for that. Just more Mhm. more and intentionally, as you're
1:43:55
saying, more and intentionally is kind of the theme of this entire episode, I think. I
1:44:00
have never ever thought about how magic smells until this book. And I think it's
1:44:06
really cool that you brought this to my attention. There are certain spells that have smells to them and I don't have
1:44:13
anything intelligent to say about that. I just think it's neat and it has this whole other like sensory level that you
1:44:18
don't get out of other magic things. Visavv light lark powerless whatever. What does magic smell like there?
1:44:25
Probably chocolate. But anyways, probably heart blood. I have I've got a small sensory detail
1:44:32
that I really liked in uh chapter 23. I don't know why I told you the chapter doesn't matter. There's a moment where
1:44:37
Chase like is startled by something and he shakes his head quote like he'd taken a shot and I thought that that was such
1:44:44
a good comparison. It's very original. It's very evocative. I don't know why this is the first thing on Ra's mind. I
1:44:50
don't think she drinks. Uh but I liked it. It felt very original to me. Is there any alcohol in the entire book?
1:44:58
Uh maybe at the noodle restaurant. Maybe at the noodle restaurant. They might have had some like novelty sake to
1:45:04
go with it. Yeah, right. Maybe they had some some sweetened rice wine beverage.

1:45:10
Yeah, I don't know. There's so much opportunity in Ra's character because she is neurode divergent. And that was
1:45:16
something that like, you know, I I wasn't really following the Tik Tok hype train. I wasn't following the Tik Tok
1:45:21
hate train, but as I learned about it, I kept hearing Audrey say that like RA is
1:45:27
intended to be neurode divergent. And I was really interested in that. insert my rant about why I like Moby Dick because
1:45:34
of the way that Ishmael talks to you here. And I I read this as favorably as
1:45:40
I could with with Ra being neurode divergent and I loved how she like gets
1:45:45
overwhelmed. There's such a natural feeling to her where I would like to see
1:45:50
more stuff in the language where it's like a a person taking a shot. Like I I wouldn't think to make that comparison and I don't think Ra should, but I think
1:45:57
it's an example of like more things that could be done for her to compare stuff to like I don't know her history stuff
1:46:04
that she loves so much or rocks or runes. She could be more idiosyncratic
1:46:10
in that way. And somebody else who I think could be equally idiosyncratic is actually Chase because I really like
1:46:16
that he as a kid started taking notes of people's vitals like when he was learning how to use his Libren healing.
1:46:22
And I would like to see that expand. This is kind of just a straightup suggestion, but it got me excited. I would like to see that medical knowledge
1:46:28
and interest, a special interest you could say even expanded into more of his character. And I think that that would
1:46:34
provide an opportunity for him and Ra to like nerd out together over their respective interests and like have it
1:46:40
doesn't have to be like a ton, one or two moments where they're exchanging little factoids about the things that
1:46:45
they care most about. I mean, medical knowledge would be very practical for her in the situation that
1:46:51
she's in, right? like she's constantly being knocked out. She's constantly sustaining all these injuries in combat. She's on the run. Uh meanwhile, Chase
1:46:58
suddenly realizes he can speak a language that he didn't think he could speak. Maybe he's curious about the
1:47:04

culture that this language belonged to. And Ra happens to know about that. And then they can just chat about it for
1:47:10
like a second, you know? I 100% agree with that. There's something charming about Chase. I can't really define it even there. He's just
1:47:16
like a a dopey little fun guy who he likes his he likes healing. He likes
1:47:22
being he's too nice. He gets very annoying. But I think that's more Audra's imposition on the narrative than
1:47:29
anything endemic to Chase's character. All of the kids actually I don't think they should be completely retoled for
1:47:36
version two. I think what they are right now is very close to what they should be
1:47:41
just as long as again certain things are more intentional or we have a little bit
1:47:47
more development. Um I didn't really mind Avia for example being a static
1:47:52
character. She almost formed like this spine or or backdrop. She she could
1:47:58
almost be the straight man in this situation, you know. Yeah. I also don't really have a problem with her not having much character
1:48:04
development. This is, like you said, intended to be the first in a series and so not every single character needs a
1:48:10
complete arc right off the jump, right? She's like a Han Solo thing where she's always going to be like a little scoundrel scamp or whatever, but you
1:48:17
know, every now and then we see like this heart of gold. Mhm. 100%. I think I already mentioned
1:48:23
this in my summary. Uh, but I really liked that we get little hints of some of the other zodiac uh, Arcturan law,
1:48:30
not laws, their other codes, I guess, or suggestions at least, like for example, Libra not being fit or like they're
1:48:38
they're frowned upon if they are fit. Um, I I liked this one in particular
1:48:43
because I thought it was interesting that there's two different codes that are enforced to different degrees that
1:48:50
both revolve around policing other people's bodies and how they should or shouldn't behave or appear or present in
1:48:57
public. It's clearly something that Audra is very invested in. And I guess this is just evidence that it it is
1:49:04
there and it can be brought out even more. Uh, like I want I guess it's just the intentionality that's missing
1:49:09

because like right now it's an incidental feature that both of these codes kind of revolve around like
1:49:15
controlling how people act. Um, but what if what if it mattered,
1:49:21
right? I'm I'm laughing because like we keep saying this. It's like it's like
1:49:26
Audra accidentally wrote a book is how it feels. Like all of these things could be so so freaking cool if they were just
1:49:34
done on purpose. Um, and speaking of that, and speaking of that, this is kind of like my big
1:49:40
good thing. I think that this book's structure is very ass backwards. It's
1:49:46
very bloated, but I think it's really interesting. I I was writing like an
1:49:52
essay about how bad I thought it was that in maybe what is actually the
1:49:58
inciting incident, not the inciting incident festival, but actually the narrative inciting incident when they're in the archive, I was so mad that RA
1:50:05
just learned that everything is a lie, that, you know, the entire system needs to go down, that nothing that she knows
1:50:13
is actually true. That's like at least a 75% mark thing or even like a book two
1:50:20
thing in any other kind of series. But it's kind of cool to to begin a story
1:50:27
with the character learning that everything is a lie. It takes it to a point where, like I said, it's like
1:50:32
National Treasure. They they need to find this McGuffin to prove or disprove
1:50:38
this thing. And what it really is is Lord of the Rings, only instead of trying to destroy a ring, they're trying
1:50:44
to disseminate information. They get the thing at the beginning and then they have to take it to a mountain and
1:50:51
creatures and entities attack them along the way. And I think that's cool.
1:50:58
There's a lot you can do with Lord of the Rings about secret knowledge and and
1:51:04
spreading the truth and dismantling oppressive systems. There's there's so much in that core conceit that that I I
1:51:12
think that the skeleton is actually just fine. It's these other little things that drag the book down.
1:51:18
I think there's like definitely a kind of wisdom or at least implicit awareness
1:51:23
of the fact that we live in a time where every human being has been exposed to more media in their lifetime than most
1:51:30
of their entire lineages previous. And so like if the twist of this book is, oh
1:51:36

my god, the government was lying about history. Everyone's going to roll their eyes because they've seen it a billion
1:51:41
times before. So instead, we almost just take it as a given that the government is lying and we're going to tell
1:51:47
everybody about it and we begin there. I agree with you. I think that that is very interesting. And I've seen some
1:51:53
criticism online of the fact that we begin the book knowing this. Um, and I think that that criticism is I
1:52:00
understand it, but I think it's wrong because I think it's fine to start here. I didn't even think of it the way that
1:52:05
you did, but I think you're absolutely right. This book kind of represents a more modern step. Compare this to
1:52:12
Divergent because of the whole like structure of the first act. Like that's that's a book where you learn that
1:52:18
shit's wrong or you you know it from the beginning, but that's a book where the protagonist learns that the world is
1:52:24
completely wrong at maybe like the end of the book. God, done correctly, this
1:52:30
book could be the divergent of this generation. Like I think I think we could absolutely have something like
1:52:36
this that would speak to a generation of people that have consumed more media than even even we have. You know what I
1:52:43
mean? So like and it's only getting worse and this is only going to get more and more important to to have stories
1:52:49
like this. Kind of on that uh topic, there's something that happened in the
1:52:54
confrontation with Verina that I mentioned in like a joke, but I do want to call out like all the kids are
1:53:00
fighting with the Arctura of Scorpio. They're in a public place. I think it's the inn or right outside of the inn.
1:53:06
There are citizens and non-combatants all around. And Ra's just screaming
1:53:12
like, "Hey, the Collelexus is in this mountain. The Scorpio code is a lie." Blah blah blah. And I was really
1:53:20
interested in that. It didn't go anywhere. So, I guess this isn't technically a good thing, but I I loved
1:53:26
the idea that again for this more modern book, there's this emphasis on different
1:53:32

ways of spreading the truth and listening to the people in your community and not trusting the words
1:53:38
that come from on high from power structures. A better and a worse book
1:53:43
would have contrived a reason for Verina to have to have Ra alone so that she
1:53:49
couldn't do it or like have other people outside of earshot like some some stupid thing would have happened. But but Audra
1:53:56
didn't and the bad thing is that nothing happened from it. But the fact that Audra didn't do that means something to
1:54:02
me and it speaks to like a very big potential in this. would love a version of this scene where Verina and her
1:54:08
little goons like try to arrange things such that nobody else is around, but
1:54:14
somehow their fight breaks containment. And then all of a sudden, Verina is trying to get people away as much as she
1:54:21
is to capture uh RA, right? And that leads to a moment where Ra is
1:54:27
able to like tell people about this. And some people like want to know like they're trying to get in closer and see
1:54:33
what's going on. But Verina is like keeping them at bay with the magic and goons and stuff because I think that
1:54:39
that uh would gel well with what you were saying where we have a version of this story that's a little bit more
1:54:45
interested in like grassroots organizing against oppressive power. It's so palpable to me the potential
1:54:51
that this book has with that regard. And the more that you were talking about it, the more I realized like how important
1:54:57
it is that that we're we're we're gentle with this book or or stories like this that could be inspired by this and come
1:55:04
afterwards. Uh cuz all of this is just so freaking cool to me. And as much of a
1:55:09
slo as our summary was, if if a little bit was just tweaked, it didn't have to
1:55:14
be like this. I got to say, Audra, um this can be done successfully. This like building on top
1:55:20
of strata of media that we're all familiar with. There's a poem by Lee Young Lee called to hold and it begins
1:55:28
so dust. A hundred years ago a sonnet would have spent 13 lines building up to
1:55:35
that as the 14th and final line trying to create this convincing argument for why our lives don't matter and in the

1:55:42
end we're all just going to be dust anyway. But Le Young Lee knows that anybody that's reading that poem has
1:55:48
read all of the poems that not all of the poems, but many of the poems that are in its lineage. Yeah. And will
1:55:54
already be familiar with poems that conclude with something like that. So he uses that ending, what would have been an ending in a prior generation as a
1:56:00
starting point to take things in a different direction. So you can definitely do this where we know that
1:56:06
the government is lying and now we're going to do something about it because we all do know that the government is lying.
1:56:11
Sure. So the The possibility is there. Yeah. So what? So the government is lying. That's line
1:56:18
one of your new. God, I'm so hyped up for this. Yeah. Get
1:56:26
get version two out. I want to see it. So this book contains my favorite
1:56:32
romance scene from any book that we have read in the last 5 years. Really?
1:56:37
Yes, it does. And that scene comes at the very end when Ra and N are back in the village and they're finally alone
1:56:44
and the scene ends with Na saying, "Tell me about what you found in the
1:56:51
woods." This is what we need in this sappic romance. We need these two characters
1:56:58
sitting down on a couch together, one with their head in the other's lap, and
1:57:04
just saying, "Hey, I care about you. Tell me about what you found in the woods because I want to know. That is
1:57:10
tender. That is human. And obviously that can't be the exact tone of the entire book because it would get dull.
1:57:17
But those moments are like clouds breaking open. Like this is a scene where two human people who are in love
1:57:25
are connecting. They are beset on all sides by crazy people who can manipulate
1:57:32
ceiling tiles into political propaganda, by evil presidents who can teleport into
1:57:39
their magic Jedi pond rooms, and by scary bisexuals. Yeah.
1:57:45
Who date your sister. But they are in love in this moment. Godamn it, they're in love. And that's
1:57:52
so nice. We just need this. And it's doubly sweet
1:57:57
because this is exactly what Ra needs. The opening scene of this book, it's
1:58:03

weird on two levels because she comes home to her sister and she's like, I have found things that have
1:58:09
fundamentally changed my views on the history of the world that we live in. And Aia is just like, I don't care. And
1:58:17
it's weird that you're so interested in it. So, it is doubly very powerful for N
1:58:23
to be like, "Hey, tell me about what you found in the woods." Because that's a level of indulgence that like we don't
1:58:29
see from any other characters. Even Chase in a goodnatured way makes fun of Ra for having special interests. And
1:58:36
like, yep, these moments really hurt me. Like I I don't identify as neurode divergent, but
1:58:41
like I've tried to explain Minecraft or Pokemon to people who absolutely didn't
1:58:47
want to hear it as a kid. And these moments like haunt me because like it it hurts so much to be talking to someone
1:58:55
who does not care about what you're interested in or even like like like SPU like I get very passionate about this
1:59:00
stuff off recording and when someone doesn't care about that, you feel it in the core of your being. and to have
1:59:07
someone be like, "Tell me about what you care about." I don't think this book contains my favorite like romance scene.
1:59:14
Not that I could identify which is my favorite romance scene, but like I think I think Na
1:59:20
together are definitely my favorite couple. It's so fraught in the beginning where there's like this amnesia plotline
1:59:26
and they have to fight each other, but there's all these memories that leak back through. It's nowhere near as bad
1:59:33
as the before chapters in Nightbane, even though I made that comparison. like they don't really kill the the pacing
1:59:40
that badly or they go away quick enough for me to not worry about it that much. And all of it just kind of rolls
1:59:46
together to where it's definitely like the most interesting romantic relationship that we've had on this
1:59:51
podcast, at least as far as I can remember. Me too. And I just want to close it out with how much I love that little
1:59:58
dialogue line. um because we are about to get into the critiques and give you some [ __ ] Audra, for the way that you
2:00:06

write wordto word. But before we do that, I want to emphasize this line works down to the diction that
2:00:14
you chose. It's not, "Hey, tell me about the runes that you discovered in
2:00:19
Conviction Woods where all the artifacts are." It's not, "Hey, do you have a favorite dagger that you picked up?"
2:00:24
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah. It's so simple. Tell me about what you found in the woods.
2:00:30
Good job, Audra. Good job, Audra. You can write. You are capable. You can write. You God, you can write.
2:00:36
You can write. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Like, the things that are good in this book are good because they
2:00:41
are good. That is a stupid sentence, but you know what I mean. It's a stupid [ __ ] sentence, but I I don't know how
2:00:47
else to phrase it. But alas, we do have to move on because like we've mentioned, there are some things that bring this
2:00:53
book down. And I think speaking them out into existence will be a good exercise in maybe identifying the things that you
2:01:00
may want to lean into or things that should be just totally excised.
Areas for improvement
2:01:08
Chase, you're Libra and healing. How did it show up for you? He tilted his head.
2:01:13
It was agonizing. I was 10. I think it burned through me like the sun itself
2:01:19
existed in my body and didn't ease up until I healed a wounded animal in the woods. I didn't know what I was doing.
2:01:27
Right. Though you began with powerful and painful magic, you needed to acrew
2:01:32
medical knowledge to refine your skills. A spirit walker's magic begins with low strength with emotional sensing, but
2:01:38
advances into more branches of magic. Sora turned to me. Ra, the onset of your
2:01:45
zodiac turning? I wasn't sure how to answer because I didn't know. I discovered it before my memory was
2:01:52
taken. So, I answered her question about what happened in Lyra. I was so angry
2:01:57
that it woke up. Correct. Zodiac turning is entirely dependent on emotional
2:02:02
control. While Liban healing centers itself in the body and blood, spirit walking is the realm of mind and water.
2:02:09

Zodiac turning draws its power from emotion, converting feelings into usable energy. Each represent Never mind.
2:02:17
Excuse me for a moment. Sora stood up, hurrying into the back kitchen to go
2:02:22
grab something. It just kind of represents a pattern this book has of they'll deliver like a little bit of
2:02:29
exposition, but then there's like a I got to go somewhere or you can't tell this to someone else like this has got
2:02:35
to be a secret and then it isn't. Yeah, that it's literally not.
2:02:43
Okay, Andrew, let's do the painful part. Um, let's rip off this mind control necklace. Um, and tell tell them how we
2:02:51
really feel. Yeah, that was actually like such a such a nice good section that it feels so
2:02:57
much worse to do this part. But, um, okay. So, it has been said, and I
2:03:02
certainly agree that this book feels like it was written by a 12-year-old. Yeah.
2:03:07
Uh, and aside from the fact that I do believe that this is literally true. I believe that there's not a lot of
2:03:13
difference between what was originally pinned and what ended up being published, the question does get begged.
2:03:20
What the [ __ ] does that mean? Like, it's such an easy insult to give to someone.
2:03:26
And and I' I'm guilty of it, too, because I did it to Powerless, and I still believe what I said about Powerless, but I I will admit that has
2:03:32
no objective measurements. And to me, at least, when I say that something is
2:03:38
written by a 12-year-old, I mean that it's punching above its weight class.
2:03:43
Like trying to sound smarter than it actually is, trying to be more than it
2:03:48
actually is. picture like a kid wearing his dad's clothes to feel smarter or
2:03:54
more powerful or whatever. Um or less powerless or less powerless.
2:04:01
Um, and what it comes down to with this book in particular is just the brick to the
2:04:09
skull malopropisms, misused words, terms that I think could
2:04:15
be neologisms that don't get contextualized as such. And I have a
2:04:20
list. It's over long and some of it might be boring, but I just want to illustrate to you how ubiquitous these
2:04:27
problems are. I want to hear it please because everybody keeps talking about it on TikTok and even on the commentary

2:04:34
side of YouTube like the drama side. So like please like let's actually index this because it needs to be done for
2:04:40
posterity. Sure. And this is not a cohesive list. This is just things that personally bothered me and there are I'll get to
2:04:46
it. Um so the word runic is used as a noun lowercase R. Runic is an adjective.
2:04:53
This could be a madeup term like runic is like the name of the alphabet, but it's not capitalized
2:05:00
and it's not in the glossery. It's not in the glossery. I think she's literally just using the adjective as a
2:05:05
noun for no reason. Mhm. At the inciting incident ceremony, you become a member of guardian. Guardian is
2:05:12
a nation. You are a citizen of a nation. I will admit you could be a member of a
2:05:17
union, which is what the subnations are, but still I'm not a member of the United States. I'm a citizen of the United
2:05:24
States. Um, in RA's stilted dialogue, she, like I mentioned, says, "I
2:05:30
apologize for my misspeak." Which is very funny to me. The hub is a center
2:05:36
for aarians who need to visit with convictionists for communication purposes.
2:05:42
That's not really malipropism, but communication purposes is probably the most awkward way you could phrase any of
2:05:50
that. Why else would you meet with someone? Well, okay, but what she means is like
2:05:57
trade or whatever. She's talking about like I guess commerce, which is I don't know what she means basically. And I
2:06:03
don't think this sentence is very illustrative of what she does mean. So, this could be a typo, but there is the
2:06:09
Stellarium that is the entity and the guards, the cops that Jay mentioned are
2:06:15
called the Stellarium. Yeah. Even in plural. Later on, Audra uses the
2:06:21
term Stellarium member or Stellarium official. So maybe being charitable, the
2:06:27
first couple instances of a person or people being called Stellarium was a typo, but the fact that it's
2:06:33
front-loaded so heavily makes me not believe that really. Sign banners are
2:06:38
placed around town. Uh you can have signs or you can have banners or you can have you can even have banners with
2:06:44

messages on them, but I don't like the term sign banners. I just think that's a little bit redundant and weird.
2:06:50
It's super strange. Um, the Collelexus bestows immortality upon infliction from its blade.
2:06:58
You inflict something upon someone. Something doesn't inflict you. There's always a what is it? Indefinite article.
2:07:06
I don't know the the grammatical term, but there's always a secondary acted upon entity there. Okay. You inflict a
2:07:13
wound or you inflict pain, you don't inflict someone with a sword.
2:07:19
Correct. Colorful stone bricks circumvent in various directions.
2:07:25
Not how you use the word circumvent. You circumvent around something. They've got a little plot going,
2:07:31
right? Well, I mean, if they circumvented the fountain, that would be something. You know what I mean? Like,
2:07:37
they're circumventing in directions. They're not circumventing around anything. The castle is lumbering. A
2:07:43
castle can sprawl. A castle can tower, but a castle doesn't lumber. You know what I mean? I I agree with you. That one I'm I'm
2:07:50
almost inclined to defend. Um, shut up. Poetry MFA. Opinion invalid.
2:07:56
I'm just going to say, Audra, intentionality on that one maybe might might get you somewhere. Some of these
2:08:01
others are just going to have to go, but a lumbering castle could be something. Fine. Okay, that one that one I feel the
2:08:08
least strongly about. Ra is offered a neglect of a choice,
2:08:13
which it's not something that you can straight up translated.
2:08:18
Yeah, it kind of does. Yeah. Yeah. Um there's such thing as a main arch power,
2:08:25
which is tautological. Yes. Arch means main.
2:08:31
Here's a quote. Um he had to be almost a foot taller than her, let alone
2:08:36
muscular. Uh, muscular is not a comparative version of that adjective unless she
2:08:41
meant muscle. You know, I don't know. Every muscle requires a muscle e, as
2:08:48
they say. He had been inflicted by muscle.
2:08:53
He's been inflicted he was inflicted with Yeah. Yeah. [ __ ] it. I don't care.
2:08:58

Yeah. It implies there's a comparison between height and muscularity. Like the two are mutually exclusive. Not even
2:09:04
that necessarily, just he had to be a almost a foot taller than her, let alone
2:09:10
more muscular, let alone as muscular. There there's got to be a comparative word there. You know what I mean?
2:09:15
Yeah. Yeah, I see. Okay. Yep. Ka's magic creates a soft bioluminescence in the water, which is
2:09:21
another thing that I kind of get because she's comparing it presumably to like bioluminescent algae or plankton or
2:09:27
whatever. But I really hope that magic is not actually genetic material because that's kind of gross.
2:09:33
It's mediclorads. What do you mean? Yeah, it's like mediclorans. There's an instance of messing up assumably and
2:09:39
presumably which don't mean the same thing. Um, you must be tunnneled on both
2:09:46
your emotions and your target. Again, this one I kind of get where it's coming from, but like tunnneled on is not a not
2:09:53
a phrase that is used. Um, like why not just say focused?
2:09:58
Yeah, focus. Yeah. Uh, tunneling. Tunnled focus. You have I don't know. Uh, it it it's just weird. He pulls a
2:10:06
sword from his holster, which is a word exclusively associated with firearms.
2:10:13
Um, it's a hilt or a scabbard for a sword. Um, or a baldri.
2:10:18
Or a baldri. Then they find the magic sword and the first thing that Ra notes
2:10:25
is that it is devoid of fingerprints. Not untouched,
2:10:30
not pristine. She's like doing like a detective thing. Did you bust out the fingerprint dust?
2:10:36
Like girl thinks she's an ace attorney. She's like, "Oh, let me get out the luminal.
2:10:42
I'll check for blood." Like, okay. So, so yeah, I there's just no
2:10:48
explanation for that one. I get that I went on for a while there. None of these things alone would have damned the book.
2:10:54
Uh, but having all of them just brick after brick after brick beats you down
2:11:01
and destroys the credibility of this book. They're circumventing my ability to understand these bricks are
2:11:07
right. Right. My mind to to use it as Audrey uses it circumvents to try to
2:11:13
understand what is going on here. even the things that you can explain away,

2:11:18
there's just no credibility there because there's other instances where where words are just blatantly misused.
2:11:24
And and that's what I mean when I say that this was written by a 12-year-old because I remember thinking that I had a
2:11:31
really big vocabulary at 12 and always trying to use those words and looking back on it, it's not good. And and I and
2:11:39
I just think this is no exception to that rule. It's not only individual words that sometimes impede
2:11:44
comprehension, but also sentence structure. Um, I don't want to go into this too much because talking about
2:11:51
syntax gets like really really horrible, but there's one persistent pattern I've noticed where, okay, so for example, if
2:11:58
you have a sentence that's about character A getting shoved and like falling to the ground or something, there will then be a comma and then like
2:12:05
a clause appended to that sentence where character B will like reach out and catch them or maybe character C will
2:12:11
even react. And it makes it really hard to understand what's even happening because these are completely separate
2:12:18
ideas that need to just be broken into separate sentences. And I think that once Audra like notices this, it'll be
2:12:25
very easy to fix, but by God does it need to be fixed because it makes you reread the same paragraphs over and over
2:12:33
and over again. Right. And okay, this is the part where I get on my soap box about the the grammar a
2:12:39
little bit. So Audrey, I want to turn to you here and say we we have some of the same diagnosis. So I think I have some
2:12:45
inkling of where some of this might be coming from. People like you and I might sometimes struggle to communicate in
2:12:53
ways that are immediately legible, but you do have options about how to go about addressing this. Like there's not
2:12:59
a one-sizefits-all solution. So, I have some suggestions about things you might could try because
2:13:05
I I know that you said that maybe this was intended to reflect Ra's neurode divergence, but let's be real. No, it
2:13:11
wasn't. You were coping when you said that. Um, this just needs to change, but it's okay because there are ways we can

2:13:17
change it and it won't like I don't think it'll destroy your vision or anything. Okay, so the first thing that I think you need to do, and this is
2:13:24
going to hurt to hear, but you just need to master normative grammar, even if it's not your default. Um, and
2:13:30
it is not every writer's default, and that is okay. You do need to master it because being proficient in the English
2:13:37
that most other readers understand most naturally will only make you more
2:13:43
accessible to a wider readership. You need to understand the rules before you can break them. Jazzlike. Once you've
2:13:49
done that, what you can do if you feel really really married to having these sentence structures and sometimes even
2:13:55
word usages that are confusing to readers, you can be more deliberate
2:14:01
about when and how you deploy these things that people tell you are confusing because done unintentionally,
2:14:08
you get roasted on YouTube, but done intentionally, you develop what we call style or voice. And that is the
2:14:15
fingerprint that we can detect on the sword of your writing to know that it is
2:14:21
yours and yours alone. Um, but in order to do that, you're going to have to sit down with an editor
2:14:28
or multiple editors and let them really walk you through even even more detail than we did how your syntax is confusing
2:14:35
and probably even more examples of how your vocabulary is confusing. But at the
2:14:41
other end of that, you will have a more personal and more nuanced relationship to language that you can then decide for
2:14:47
yourself how confusing and how jarring you want it to be for the reader,
2:14:52
right? Slash end rant slash rant. I um I'll pick that rant back up cuz I
2:14:59
promised myself I would not go on and on about Moby Dick, but this is a great opportunity to do so. Uh, Ishmael has
2:15:08
all of the same problems that that you, Audra, allege is intentional on Ra's
2:15:13
part. He is scatterbrained. He is hyperfixated. He drops subjects out of nowhere. He
2:15:20
stops the action for him to explain his very, well, at the time accurate, but
2:15:25
very dated opinions about whales and knowledge about science that just does not make s. Like, he's he's completely

2:15:32
ranting about his special interests. Basically, dude, Lob Dick is spreading whale misinformation. That's so problematic.
2:15:38
But it's still readable. It is still readable. All of these things come through without instances like Jay was
2:15:45
calling out of you can't focus because like a like a needle on a on a record
2:15:52
that's been sanded away. It's just slipping all over the place because it can't find the groove. You can do all of
2:15:58
these things and convey all of these things about your character and have it represent these quirks without being
2:16:07
terrible to read. Yeah. Or or and here, okay, poetry MFA moment.
2:16:12
So, Andrew, shut up or close your ears or whatever. You can be really really confusing and you can make your reader
2:16:18
uncomfortable and you can write a book that nobody likes the experience of consuming in the pursuit of art. you are
2:16:26
allowed to do that. You will you will sacrifice readership. You will probably
2:16:32
get a lot of criticism from schmucks who don't understand what you're after. And
2:16:37
you won't be able to operate in your current genre. You will not be able to write commercial fantasy, romantic, whatever the hell we want to call this.
2:16:44
Yeah. Uh but it is a choice if James Joyce can do it. It is a choice that is available to you and I want you to be aware of that. I
2:16:50
would always advocate in these SBU episodes for the authors in question to just go off the grid and start writing
2:16:56
just completely experimental speculative works. Uh but I
2:17:02
know that's not a viable economic option for a lot of these people. Yeah. Um well, hey, she's got a six figure
2:17:08
business now. She can disappear to wherever the hell she wants. Yeah, six figures. That's so much money these days. I don't have much to add for
2:17:16
uh the the whole syntax thing. I will say I love semicolons. I love M dashes.
2:17:22
I use way too many M dashes in my pros and I hate that that's become a chat GPT indicator. Uh because I will die for my
2:17:29
right to use M dashes. Right. Um look what they need to mimic a fraction of our power.
2:17:35
Right. You use them too much, Audra. You got to cut this back. Half of the sentences in this book come off the same
2:17:42

as like what was the quote from that one movie? Um, my mother was in the Amazon
2:17:47
re researching spiders before she died. Yeah, he was with my mother in the rainforest researching spiders with her
2:17:54
before she died. Yeah, half the sentences in this book sound like that same kind of vibe. So, that's
2:18:00
that's just a less intelligent way of saying what Jay was just saying. The syntax has got to get changed. Yeah. Okay, moving on from syntax. Um,
2:18:08
we need more environmental description just across the board. This book has something that I recently heard referred
2:18:14
to as white room syndrome. They don't literally feel like white rooms cuz we usually do know, you know, explicitly
2:18:19
what kind of environment we're in, but because we don't get much specificity,
2:18:25
I'm imagining like the Disneyland version of a haunted forest and the Disneyland version of a mountain village
2:18:31
and the Disneyland version of where else do we even go? A cave. Um,
2:18:37
these feel like stock assets that um Yeah. don't have any personality to them that
2:18:44
I feel like if you if you punched through them, you would reveal that everything is made out of plaster.
2:18:50
Yeah. Um and that just on the other side of the cave wall is like somebody putting on their Chimera costume to get ready
2:18:56
for the big fight scene. We just need something to give us a sense of like what flavor of fantasy
2:19:02
this is at the very least. Are there particular colors that different societies favor? What materials are
2:19:09
things made out of? What kinds of stuff are on those sign banners? Just little
2:19:15
little details so that we can connect the dots ourselves about what these places look like. Yeah, that's a really good call out
2:19:21
because it would be so natural to fold that in with a again more Ishmael like
2:19:27
version of Ra's narration. We set her up in chapter one as having all of these like really alienating special interests
2:19:34
in exploring things and new cultures and history. And we miss all of these travel
2:19:42
log segments where Ra could be pointing out different landmarks or oversharing her knowledge
2:19:49
about this that or the other historical event that happened in this area. There there's so much texture you could add

2:19:56
just to these transitional scenes. you'd have to cut out some therapy speak trading scenes, but I think I think it's
2:20:02
worth the sacrifice. Historical stuff was on my mind as well because I don't know if I mentioned, but um I just got
2:20:08
back to the country from a foreign land. And when I was living there, one thing that always stood out to me was that in
2:20:14
almost every town I went to, there would be a memorial to soldiers who fought in the first and sometimes even the Second
2:20:21
World War. And I don't know if I mentioned, but the country that I was in was Austria, which um wasn't exactly on
2:20:27
the rightest side of those particular conflicts. And yet they have attempted to construct a cultural narrative in
2:20:35
which their veterans get the same kind of respect, you know, that we might give our veterans over here in the US. And
2:20:40
regardless of how you feel about veterans in general, this world guardian
2:20:46
and all of its four countries are operating within a constructed and intentionally constructed history. And
2:20:52
so you would think there would be monuments of various kinds around which would give RA the opportunity to be like, oh, okay, that monument is to that
2:20:59
guy and they say he did this, but actually he did such and such. And that's all you need. It it it helps
2:21:05
RA. It helps the world. All of these things are symbiotic. Mhm. All you got to do is just make the
2:21:11
connection. I got to get boring again for a second just to get this out of the way. There are nowhere near enough
2:21:17
dialogue tags for this book to work. Especially when there's more than two speakers in a scene, it gets impossible
2:21:24
to tell who is speaking at what time. I don't know if this is true or not, but Audrey, I think some people would tell
2:21:30
you to like strengthen the voices of the characters, which is another kind of one of those nebulous pieces of writing
2:21:37
advice. I would not worry about this right now because what that's going to lead to for an underpracticed,
2:21:44
overzealous writer is really annoying animeesque dialogue quirks that just
2:21:50
absolutely would not service the actual like narrative continuing on. Um, said
2:21:57

is not dead. I don't even mind like the fanfictiony dialogue tags like growled.
2:22:03
Anything but nothing basically is what I need for this. That's funny that you say that because I actually um had a little
2:22:10
note about how we could make the characters sound more individual. Oh no.
2:22:15
Um but as long as it doesn't involve saying yar yar. Yeah. They need to start saying forget about it. Um, I I think that we could
2:22:23
square this circle though and have both of us be right because the characters that need to change their voices the
2:22:29
most are characters like Atlas Fulbright, who despite being a leading government official, sounds no different
2:22:36
from Chase or Ra, who are basically undergrads. And that struck me as
2:22:41
extremely idiosyncratic slash neg. Um, it's fine if Chase and Ra sound a little bit similar to me. I don't mind that too
2:22:48
much. I do think if we have characters across the board stop using so much therapy speak that might solve a little
2:22:55
bit of the lack of distinct voices, but mainly characters who come from radically different um backgrounds
2:23:02
should just sound different. Characters who occupy different social strata should sound a little bit different.
2:23:08
There was something in particular that Atlas Fulbright said in that scene where he pulls them into his office out of the
2:23:14
blizzard that stood out to me and now I can't think of what it was, but it was something like he he like snapped back
2:23:19
at something that one of them said and it came across as like very juvenile to me. It doesn't really matter. I I just
2:23:25
think that stuff like that needs to be massaged out. No. Yeah. I I think massaged out is the right word there. I I got a little bit
2:23:32
bristly when you mentioned Atlas because I actually really like the way that he's presented in there. I like that he's
2:23:38
this very gruff kind of mean Oscar the Grouchish kind of character cuz it it
2:23:45
draws a lot of parallels between him and Aia which hints at some like
2:23:50
universality to their origins. So he wouldn't be the one that I would call I
2:23:55
I I absolutely think he needs to be massaged. I think the whole thing needs to be massaged, but he would not be the one that I would call out specifically.
2:24:02

I don't think make them more idiosyncratic is bad advice. I just think it is a very easily like something
2:24:07
in real life critique group that we saw all the time where you told someone to do something and then they did it like
2:24:13
Amelia Bedilia like way too literally way too extremely and it just blew up
2:24:18
the entire thing. Yes. Yeah. It's easy to misinterpret that kind of advice, right? So the first thing I'd do is
2:24:24
dialogue tags. Then we can talk about the voices of the individual characters. Another thing we can do that speaking of
2:24:30
symbiosis is not itself the way characters sound but is influencing the way that they sound is we need less of
2:24:36
these like Noah man of destiny ass interactions where people are like how are you doing today Ra? I am doing very
2:24:43
well thank you. Please have a seat on my couch. Would you like me to remove your sword necklace for you? Like we just
2:24:49
need to get rid of all of that pleasantry stuff and we need to cut out all of the instances where characters
2:24:56
tell each other things that we already know and just in a sentence be like, "And then they caught Aia up on all that
2:25:02
weird [ __ ] about Chase's dad." It's that simple. And that was it. That's all it takes.
2:25:08
Because when the characters start expositing to each other, they they slip into sounding like exposition in
2:25:15
narration and that makes them all sound all the same by extension. Right? So
2:25:20
that's the problem is I actually think that there is a lot of separation between the voices already, but they're
2:25:26
forced into these roles that are completely expository or just to pat Ra on the back. So their their their
2:25:32
purpose becomes so unified that their voices get stripped out because there are moments like I I can tell you how
2:25:38
each of these characters feel and each of these characters feel a different way to me. So that something is working at
2:25:44
least subconsciously. I think it's just these situations that they get forced into. There is nothing that you can tell
2:25:51
me, Audra, that will justify two different families living secretly
2:25:57
in these woods that are supposed to be completely uninhabitable and one never

2:26:03
finding each other and two never being found out individually. You get the
2:26:08
impression that this world is very tiny and and this is a dystopian world. So
2:26:16
surely there are records and people monitoring where people live and there's there's lip service paid yes to RA
2:26:23
having a fake address in the city somewhere but no one ever notices them
2:26:29
walking into the woods. No one ever calls upon their house. You can't tell me anything that will justify this. It
2:26:35
doesn't make any sense to me. Yeah, I don't have much else to add to that. It's an insanely good point. Uh, and it doesn't make any sense that they
2:26:42
don't meet each other at the very least and exchange advice on how to evade taxes or whatever it is they're doing
2:26:48
out there. And and what's the deal with the woods anyways? This might be just a game of is Andrew stupid?
2:26:53
What's the deal with Conviction Woods? Well, well, there's all this talk about like the curses and the fact that like
2:27:01
magic evil wolves will eviscerate you the second that you step out there.
2:27:06
I thought it would matter more. Yeah, me too. They leave the woods. They never come back to the woods. There's nothing
2:27:11
in the woods that they need. They just happen to be able to survive there. And it's not even
2:27:17
interesting that they can. They might as well just be in the normal woods. Like, what what about these woods
2:27:24
is so special? You know, least they could do is have these characters who are immune to the conviction woods curse
2:27:30
have to forage in the woods at some point in the story and like struggle to survive. Because that would be ironic if
2:27:37
like for everybody else the woods would kill them instantly, but for these kids that are immune, they're still struggling because they're just not good
2:27:43
at foraging. That would still that would at least be something something. It would be something. God,
2:27:48
to kind of close out the nitpicks cuz I really don't care too much about some of this stuff. We've talked about this in our good stuff and we've talked about in
2:27:55
our summary. It is 2025. YA slop has been part of our zeitgeist for nigh over
2:28:01
a decade a if not longer than that depending on how you taxonomize things.
2:28:06

We have moved on from the inciting incident festival certainly the kind that is displayed in this book. It's
2:28:13
terrible. Nothing happens in it. There's no weight. There's no one not many people are physically diagetically in
2:28:20
the scene. Don't have it. Do not have it. There's no reason to have it.
2:28:25
Nothing happens. But Andrew, a scary lady in a black robe, watches the entire
2:28:31
thing, tapping her fingers together, and it was so important that I even remembered to mention it in my summary.
2:28:38
Of course, that that brain is a steel cage. Um, okay. Oh, wow. Wait. Oh, I'm
2:28:44
seeing I'm seeing a vision of version two where Ra walks out of the woods and she almost makes it home and there's a
2:28:51
scary lady watching in the trees, but she can't be sure because it's such a dark forest. Bam. Done. That's the only
2:28:59
thing that comes out of the inciting incident ceremony. And you can put it literally anywhere else or just not have
2:29:05
it there either. Just don't have it. Don't have it. Bad. Boo. Okay, Andrew. Um, I have a little bit of
2:29:10
a spicy one. It's kind of a twofer, actually. Uh oh. The first is so whenever the Scorpio
2:29:16
cops are like raiding people's houses and killing them for being in relationships, I believe every single time without
2:29:23
exception, the couple is explicitly or is implied to be queer. And I do not
2:29:28
think that Audra intended anything by this. I do not want anyone to hear what I'm saying and think that I'm suggesting
2:29:33
that she intended something by this. I think that this is just an incidental feature of this book having so many
2:29:40
queer characters that for some reason whenever the cops do a raid, it's on a a queer relationship. Um, I just don't
2:29:47
like seeing it so many times. I think that at least a couple of the times the couple should be straight. It's
2:29:52
whatever, right? The real thing that I want to get to that is linked to that associatively by the topic of queer readings of this
2:29:59
book. I really want these characters to stop announcing to whom they are and are
2:30:06
not attracted. Yeah. Because it's mad annoying. It's so so so
2:30:11
irritating. With the caveat that if done intentionally, it could be really interesting. So these characters with

2:30:18
the exception of maybe Ka although her also at times they read as extremely juvenile. Some of these characters seem
2:30:24
like they are literally leaving mommy and daddy's house for an extended period for the first time ever. And they are
2:30:30
young. So I can get that they are coming into their own identities. They're eager to express that to other people. But
2:30:36
this is not a world in which it seems like there is any purity culture or any stigma against any particular sexuality.
2:30:43
So, I have a harder time believing that the characters would feel the need to consistently like state these things
2:30:49
about themselves the way that younger people in our real world do because of historic oppression. So, I just think
2:30:56
that we can just have the characters be attracted to who they're attracted to. If there's a moment or two in the
2:31:02
narrative where a character is hitting on one of the protagonists and the protagonist needs to say like not
2:31:08
interested, that's fine. We don't need all these extended jokes about who is
2:31:13
into. We don't need all these instances where I'm actually a lesbian. Like we we we
2:31:20
get it. Like the cover the cover sells it better than anything RA ever says. I've told people that
2:31:27
we're reading this book for the show and people have been like, "Oh, I've seen the cover of that. Is it like a sappic
2:31:33
thing?" And yes, it is. And people they can tell. So, like you don't need to keep doing this,
2:31:39
right? Yeah. And there's good and bad versions of that. The bad is with Chase. It's almost [ __ ] shaming. The way that
2:31:46
they do that thing where the receptionist or whatever at the dorm where they're trying to get in another
2:31:52
bedroom so they can hide from the cops and the guy is just like, "Wow, Chase, you sure do sleep with
2:31:58
men." And that's the joke. Like, it's not it's not funny. It it again feels
2:32:03
like [ __ ] shaming and regressive for this world that seems like not to really labor under those problems aside from
2:32:10
the Scorpio code uh love or whatever. But that again that doesn't say you can't be gay. It just says you can't
2:32:16
love period. Um and it's good when it's more incidental like you mentioned when

2:32:21
it comes up and it's it's relevant and it's not being used against a character.
2:32:26
Uh, Aia, for instance, is like, I think N and Chase are both hot. And it's it's
2:32:32
a stupid joke and it's done at a stupid time in the story, but I don't think it's quite as egregious as being
2:32:39
needlessly cruel to this bisexual man for no reason. And I think, Audrey, if for some reason you are really married
2:32:46
to this idea of characters stating their sexuality, I think just lean into it. Like again, they are young. Mhm.
2:32:52
I have known people like this when I was I don't know in undergrad. Um but but make it clear somehow that we
2:33:00
are meant to know as the reader that the characters are being a little immature in this moment.
2:33:06
Ka have Ka not be into this kind of talk and maybe like lightly chastise them or
2:33:12
kind of roll her eyes about all this weird sex talk. It's that easy. It is interesting how
2:33:18
these like social dynamics get fossilized even in this world that's ostensibly untouched by all these
2:33:27
problems that our world has. I want to talk more about that relationship between NA.
2:33:33
I I love the relationship. I think a lot of the things that happen are very powerful, but there's a couple things
2:33:39
that I think are terrible. Um, I don't think this came up in the summary, but
2:33:44
in the flashbacks, Nara calls Ra Kira.
2:33:49
Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. Incidentally, yeah, you forgot about it because Ra never like wakes up and she's
2:33:57
like, "Oh, why was she calling me Kira? Are those even my memories? Are these the memories of someone else?" And it
2:34:03
may be like the last chapter where Nar is just like, "Oh, that's a nickname I made up for you when we were kids." And
2:34:09
that that's not given any particular weight. This is just conjecture, but I think this is like a a self Easter egg
2:34:17
for for Audra herself. Like this was the original name of Ra way back in the day
2:34:22
and she just wanted like some reference just to scratch her own brain about that because it really
2:34:29
it's not interesting. It's not cool. It makes me think of Death Note, which I
2:34:34

like, but I still don't want to think about right now. Like I just I don't understand. The velocity at which Ra and
2:34:41
N fall back in love is is just a tick too high. Yeah. I'm okay with it happening. I'm okay
2:34:48
with them finding each other physically attractive. And then over time as they gain more memories, they realize that
2:34:55
they can pick up the pieces. But they are two different people now. They have
2:35:01
a whole new thing that they need to address. Even if all of their memories came back perfectly,
2:35:06
there's a lot that is completely changed to both of them. And I think it is not
2:35:14
great in the long term that they just fall back into their old couples routine.
2:35:19
Yeah, I agree because it kind of retroactively minimizes the fact that they've been trying to kill each other.
2:35:25
That would change the nature of your relationship, like it or not. And to suggest otherwise is to kind of like uh
2:35:31
unrealistically oversimplify and thus rob yourself of like the opportunity to have the relationship develop in a more
2:35:38
more textured way. There's just a weird missed opportunity there and it's nice and I don't think kind of like what you
2:35:44
were saying with the queer reading of some of the violence. I don't think it's done intentionally or the discomfort
2:35:50
there is super bad or wrong. I just think there needs to be more lip service
2:35:55
given to how fraught of a situation this is. I have one more thing and it kind of
2:36:02
ties us back around to the first thing, one of the first things you said, Andrew, about how this book sometimes
2:36:07
really, really feels like it was written by a 12-year-old because it thinks it's smarter than it is. Yeah. One of the moments where this book
2:36:14
attempts to explicitly tackle theme stood out as a place where it felt like
2:36:19
the book was trying to perform bookness because it was written by a kid that like didn't know that the book already
2:36:26
has themes uh without you having to like grab the reader by by the shoulders and
2:36:31
tell them. So, I'm going to read a slightly longer passage right here, um, where the book attempts to like have a
2:36:39
theme, capital H, capital A, capital T. This is from chapter 35. There is a
2:36:44

balance in our world, a balance that cannot be disrupted by the removal of one link to the chain. The Zodiac
2:36:51
Turners, a blend of the humanity force itself handling life and death in their hands, were feared creatures stolen away
2:36:58
by the likes of history, war, and misunderstanding. But to balance this world, there comes an understanding that
2:37:05
not all is good and not all is bad. To call the wolf a beast without looking past its balance to the forest, a
2:37:13
disruption is caused to the ecosystem. To take the Zodiac Turner and our emotions from us distorts our own
2:37:19
perceptions of the good and the bad. To deny that, we must learn to balance our power and morality alike. to learn that
2:37:25
our emotions do not dilapidate us but drive us forward to become better at the
2:37:31
magic we wield to better ourselves and the societies around us. That was written by a 12-year-old.
2:37:37
Yeah, that was that is what we call philosophing aka sophistry.
2:37:45
That's not good. I don't have anything to say to that. That like spaghettified my brain that whole passage.
2:37:50
Yeah, I felt like I was being put in one of those Olive Garden cheese grers that's like Yeah. Yeah. Oh god. Yeah.
2:37:57
Um, that's a that's a really good passage. I am so mad about the
2:38:02
inexplicable Driscoll comprehension that Chase has as a Liban healer. One, that
2:38:09
doesn't make any sense to me. Two, everything that I pointed out in the summary, like why do people trust him?
2:38:16
What's the association? Maybe there was some kind of association between like this old lurggical language and the fact
2:38:22
that he's a Librian healer, but it really didn't make any sense to me. And what it comes down to is I'd really just
2:38:28
like a more mundane explanation for it. Like I don't I don't know if you know this Jay, but you and I have a magical
2:38:36
ability. Since we've equipped the spell of German cognition 3, we gained the
2:38:43
passive effect uncanny comprehension of Dutch one. I want to know are are Driskll and
2:38:51
Autaric or whatever the [ __ ] etmologically related to the point where they're almost mutually intelligible?
2:38:58

Like does he possess some uncanny like linguistics knowledge that he could have
2:39:04
as a special interest? Like I I I'm genuinely asking cuz I think both of those explanations would be cooler than
2:39:10
I can completely for no reason understand this [ __ ] No, that's a good point because the way that it's um justified that he speaks it
2:39:17
is that it's like a passive perk like like one of those things you get when you're creating a D&D character sheet
2:39:24
just for picking a specific race. You know, you get like one bonus language or whatever.
2:39:29
And I don't buy it. Not only does it feel contrived, but it's also less interesting than what you're suggesting.
2:39:35
Like if he had a reason to be able to kind of understand it from maybe the medical knowledge that he has acquired
2:39:41
over the years, like maybe some of that old stuff is written in a language that's related to this runic drix or
2:39:47
whatever. Then at least it feels like it's a result of his character choices and not just like a thing that happens
2:39:52
to him. No, that's so cool. Take away what I said. My suggestions were stupid. make
2:39:58
it because of what Jay said because this this happens in real life. Like I have put halfass acid effort into learning
2:40:05
Greek and now even though I'm not interested in animals, I am better at
2:40:11
understanding like the scientific names of certain animals or certain medical concepts that I would not have known
2:40:18
otherwise. Even though I don't like animals and I don't like medical stuff. So if if it's like Greek or Latin and he
2:40:24
learns all the names of the bones and that's how he makes that association, that would be cool. That would be really
2:40:31
really cool. I love that. I love that. That's another opportunity to include worldbuing details, which again has been
2:40:38
one of the big selling points of this series since the first Tik Tok about it, right? Is like, oh, the world building has been
2:40:46
steeping in my mind for 10 years now. I'm going to like try to convey this
2:40:51
extremely rich world to you. Um, and if I'm being honest, the world that I'm
2:40:58
reading is super super bland, which leads me to believe that it's still locked up here, Audra, for the audio
2:41:04

only consumers. I'm tapping my head. Uh, like I think that you have this world,
2:41:10
you just aren't describing it yet. And including this kind of stuff is what you need to do to get it get it out there.
2:41:16
Yeah, I I kind of have a cruer belief about that. I just it's like what I said about the editors. I don't believe her.
2:41:21
I I don't believe that this world is that developed even in in her brain. But
2:41:26
if I can ask uh like sort of a distracting question then like what do you think she's been doing for the 10,000 hours that she claims she spent
2:41:33
writing in world building? Honestly, yeah. I think there's a trilogy. Three of those uh however many 10 books that she
2:41:41
claims to have written. I think three of them were the story of Matias and Silas
2:41:47
and Sora and whatever. You think we're going to get a prequel? I don't know if we're going to get a prequel, but I think she's written that
2:41:54
a million times. She's talked about trying to find a way to like have a natural beginning point. So, I think
2:42:00
she's jumped around in this world, but she's never mired in one era. Mhm.
2:42:06
I think she probably knows about Aia's grandkids and and Aia's grandfather, but doesn't
2:42:14
know about how the day-to-day operations of the exchange center works. It's a
2:42:20
breath versus depth thing. That makes a lot of sense to me. I don't know that she has sat down and asked
2:42:26
herself how the magic systems interact, for instance. Um, like what level of technology is
2:42:32
this world at? if there's people that that can water bend and use that water
2:42:39
bending to like steer boats for example because like the boat that we actually
2:42:44
see I have it on good authority doesn't make a lot of sense in our world let
2:42:50
alone make sense considering the fact that there are water benders about so like yeah I think you're right it
2:42:57
seems like she has thought about a lot of things very shallowly and not many things very deeply
2:43:03
and and This is the only thing I'll say about it because I really don't like it when content creators bring up their own craft. But I say that because I've done
2:43:10
it. I have a trilogy of the parents and I have a trilogy of the children and I
2:43:15
thought I would do like a a septtology and it didn't work because I never once sat down and thought about the the

2:43:22
day-to-day operations of any one era. I know that I came off really gruff, but I'm I'm mad because I see a lot of
2:43:29
myself in Audra. Um yeah, it's like you want to stop it. You want to stop it before Right.
2:43:34
Before it becomes terminal. Don't end up like me, you're still you're a lot of things
2:43:40
right now, but you're better than me. Um, okay. What is the deal with Ra's
2:43:46
mother? How did she end up getting involved with the mortals? Did I miss something? Is
2:43:52
Andrew stupid? Idk. Audra would, if she were here, would say something like, "This is going to come
2:43:58
up in book two." Okay, fine. But I want this lampshaded. I want RA to think
2:44:03
about it. I want someone to ask this question other than me, like I always say, because this book puts so much
2:44:10
stock in a a very real phenomenon of stories of women and women's lives being
2:44:17
overtaken by the actions of men and men changing the stories of women's contributions. This is all real. This is
2:44:24
all important to write a book about. I'm not trying to diminish that. But I am calling out that that feels inongruous
2:44:31
with this huge blind spot we have for Ra's mother. Uh in fact, I was revolted
2:44:36
at the blloise suggestion from Aia that Ra is the the product of a
2:44:43
non-consensual relationship. And the fact that that's really the only gesture we get towards
2:44:49
that part of history is just it feels really really wrongheaded to me. and and
2:44:55
even even a poultry gesture of goodwill to the reader to be like, "Hey, yeah,
2:45:01
this mystery will continue in volume two is all I would really ask for there." Yeah, I don't think I have much to add
2:45:07
to that. I think that's a really great catch. It's a bit ironic to see this book erase a woman's story in service of
2:45:14
saying like it sucks when women's stories are erased and not acknowledge that that's what it's doing because
2:45:19
again if done intentionally to be kind of meta commentary situation
2:45:24
but we need that extra step to let us know that's what's happening. I want to close out my whole rant kind of I've
2:45:31
been jumping around just like Ra does in her narration, but I want to come back to craft for a second because in the

2:45:37
narrative that has come to surround this book, I hear a lot of things that piss me off to hear about my own things like
2:45:44
or used to piss me off when I heard about them or like writing advice that I don't understand. Uh like like Sounds
2:45:51
like a 12-year-old or um show versus tell. Uh, I hate show versus tell
2:45:58
because good telling is far and away better than bad showing. You can
2:46:03
absolutely tell the reader things. It takes time to show the reader things. So, it's kind of a balancing act.
2:46:10
There's two really good examples of misusing showing versus telling in this book that I think are something that
2:46:17
you, the listener or Audre could take home and apply to future writing endeavors. I made a little bit of a
2:46:24
reference to this when um Chase mentions off-handedly to Kaya, "Oh, Ra's been
2:46:29
spouting off exposition about history all the way to Lyra." We never see this.
2:46:35
We never see this happen. This is never shown to us. We're told expost facto in this one line and it's a kind of like a
2:46:42
little joke shrug at the expense of RA. even one scene, even like a high-level
2:46:50
exposition scene of of her saying, "Oh, I explained to my new friends all about
2:46:55
these statues and grave sites that we saw along the way would have been showing and telling and made this not
2:47:01
weird and vestigial." And then there is something that I did like again with Ka
2:47:07
being so mature and cooler than all the other kids in the situation. There's
2:47:12
this like misused dramatic irony. Kind of like what you were saying about like calling out book things that get done
2:47:19
and literary techniques. Ra says, "Kaia was a reflection of all that I held back
2:47:25
growing up against the Solarium and my curiosity pushed me to know more about her story. She wanted revenge and so do
2:47:32
I. This should not be in the text. You should have RA be interested in Kaya,
2:47:38
but I don't think Ra even necessarily should know, let alone define exactly
2:47:44
what it is about Kaya that appeals to her so much. And the fact that we're we're told this makes Annie showing
2:47:50
subsequently a lot cheaper. So, these aren't very like grand examples, but I

2:47:56
think they're both very emblematic of like a very clichéed bit of writing advice that I I hope would be helpful to
2:48:03
any hypothetical person who doesn't like showand tell just like I don't. I think that that speaks to a broader point that
2:48:09
you've brought up on the show before that is evergreen. Um, there is always
2:48:15
somebody out there who will ask you to give them $10 for them to tell you these
2:48:21
extremely easy maxims like show don't tell. And in reality, it is much more
2:48:28
situational than that. And um, Audra, I'm sure that you are getting a lot of writing advice right
2:48:34
now. Most of which I'm sure is well-intentioned. Uh, but there will be a lot of people who are trying to offer
2:48:41
you the one thing that will fix this book. And there isn't that one thing. And it's certainly not show versus tell.
2:48:47
No. I hope that you'll be judicious in the kinds of advice that you listen to. Which is not
2:48:52
not me trying to be sneaky and say like, "So listen to us." Although I do think we've offered some good advice today.
2:48:58
I just I just hope that you will not fall into the trap of fleeing into comfortable certainty even when that
2:49:04
certainty is wrong. It is so easy for for bad actors to get into spaces like
2:49:09
this where there's so much ambiguity and so much conditionality and people who are just coming into it are just like I
2:49:17
need rigid rules now and it's probably something that Audra would definitely be
2:49:22
susceptible to. Uh and I I worry so much about this. I honestly in my ideal world
2:49:29
we would get book two but this book would never be rewritten because whatever lessons that Audra is going to
2:49:35
be getting from this from the whole narrative that surrounds her are just
2:49:41
whatever voices are the loudest and whoever gets lucky enough to get into these circles and it's going to be
2:49:47
people who say show don't tell. It's going to be people who say put dialogue quirks in everyone's dialogue so they
2:49:52
sound like different anime characters. and it makes me so terrified. I guess we will see to what degree
2:49:59
that's starting to be the case very shortly. But first, what do you say we close out this critique section with a

2:50:05
little fixes subsection? I feel like we've done a pretty good job of working a lot of suggestions into both our
2:50:11
compliments and our critiques. So, maybe we can kind of couple these two segments together and and close things out.
2:50:18
Yeah, we've definitely teed it up and now we can hit it away right after this
2:50:23
break. I was paralyzed. Chase's frantic yells to pull its attention away failed
Our Suggestions & Soapboxes
2:50:29
as it stared directly at me. Its nose wrinkled in a snarl as it bent its head close to my face. Slitted blue eyes
2:50:36
stared into my soul, a foul breath wafting across my face. Beads of acid
2:50:42
and bubbling saliva dangled on its pink tongue, its teeth shining with scarlet
2:50:47
stains. It will devour you, the metaphysical before the physical. The words echoed
2:50:54
from the beast as it laughed at me, mocking my own description of the beasts of conviction woods. But child, I am not
2:51:02
your greatest nightmare. It bent closer, a drop of its saliva stinging against my
2:51:08
cheek. You are your own greatest nightmare, and with the passing of time,
2:51:13
I am allowing you a blessing. Your death will inevitably grant life to those you
2:51:19
love. That was probably really deep when she was 12.
2:51:26
All right, Jay. So, like you said, we've kind of laid out everything that we like, dislike, think could be handled
2:51:32
differently. I always like to have like a little bow tie section just to make sure that there are takehomes and
2:51:40
actionable ideas that Audra can use to literally rewrite her book this time.
2:51:46
Not even like a bit like we normally do. I felt like I monopolized the last section, so I wanted to hand everything
2:51:52
over to you. Make sure that you get your big suggestions in for for old Audra.
2:51:58
A lot of my fixes or suggestions or whatever you want to call them in this section are going to come in the form of
2:52:03
questions. I think that this book, despite appearing to us as in the form
2:52:10
of wearing the skin of a novel, is I think in in a really early draft. And so
2:52:16
like you, I would wish for a world in which we don't get a rewrite of this, but rather we just get book two. But I

2:52:23
think we are going to get probably a rewrite of this. Um, so in service of
2:52:29
speeding along the next iteration of this book, I think that Audrey could be
2:52:34
well served by asking herself some questions. And I think that these are also questions that anybody out there who is in the middle of working on an
2:52:40
early or middle draft of their own novel can also ask themselves. Um, but actually before I get into those, I have
2:52:47
I have one non-qu question, so I'll lead with that. Um, just to be confusing and distracting
2:52:52
in the way that it feels to read Age of Scorpius, right? Right. Not to be political, but I think that
2:52:59
maybe the zodiac sign should possibly mean anything like literally at all in this book if it's supposed to be zodiac
2:53:07
themed. That's a big one for me. I I really think that we need the zodiac signs to
2:53:13
be more than just little symbols that people scribble on their capes and more
2:53:18
than just things that kind of loosely determine what magic you're likely to be born with. I want to know to what degree
2:53:26
people are actually linked to astrology and the planets and if those things
2:53:34
determine personality or if it's the other way around in this world. If people have feelings about that
2:53:41
deterministic universe, right, anything, literally anything would be
2:53:46
better than what we have right now, which is to be clear, nothing at all. If I had to guess, I think that at one
2:53:52
point this was conceived as like they were using zodiac terminology, but it
2:53:57
was like a uh like a race or like a genetic thing. And then there was
2:54:02
another version of this where it is literally just your actual star sign. And I think what ended up coming out
2:54:10
into the world is this weird chimera of both of those ideas together because
2:54:16
certain things seem to be blood related and all of our characters are related by blood to these very powerful magicians.
2:54:23
And I like what you were saying about the the fingerprinting and stuff, but yeah. I mean, I think these are
2:54:28
literally just zodiac signs, but they mean even less than what they do in our
2:54:35
current world. Cuz like I mean to kind of like play my hand about my opinions about astrology, it's not real, but it's

2:54:41
real, you know? Like I had a friend who could guess people's star sign double blinded based off of like certain
2:54:48
certain descriptors or whatever. So it was like I guess she was like really into Homestuck now that I think about it. But point is point is there's so
2:54:56
much that could be done with this idea that just isn't done. Cancers aren't like cancers. Uh, I I say cuz I'm a
2:55:04
Cancer, so I know what to look for. Ra isn't a Scorpio like I've ever known a
2:55:09
Scorpio. I I really don't even like it being related to the star sign because
2:55:14
that talk about questions. Do people just not have sex on certain days
2:55:21
because of the risk that like bad star signs are going to be born? Are there like de facto mating seasons where
2:55:29
people have sex cuz they want a certain star sign? I think everyone's just Catholic and
2:55:35
they try to like time when they have sex. There's talk about inducing early
2:55:40
births, which again begs the question, why didn't you just have sex like a day before? But I have to ask the
2:55:47
uncomfortable question of why have sex for reproductive purposes on a date that
2:55:53
you know is going to be problematic? A good question. With no answer
2:55:58
with no answers. Uh like like and what are the relative populations of the star
2:56:03
signs because of this? Yeah. And to shift the focus from the
2:56:08
star sign as a symbol to the star sign as a literal thing. Do we know if these constellations even exist? Like this is
2:56:15
Earth, right? So like presumably they do. This is Earth. Yes. Uh but what do you mean it literally exists?
2:56:21
Like do these constellations exist in the night sky above Guardian? I I hope to Christ they are because if
2:56:28
they're not that's a whole other can of worms. But it just it seems weird to me that I I don't recall a moment where any
2:56:33
character ever looks up and is like, "Oh my god, there is Oh yeah, Aquarius. That's like my that's my
2:56:41
thing. Like I really feel that. I don't know. That's a good call out. Yeah, you're
2:56:46
right. That's That's not once brought up. No one ever equates themselves with
2:56:52
Huh. No one looks up. They spend most of their time in a cave, though, so to be fair.

2:56:57
That's That's true. Likewise, somebody uh on the SPO Discord actually called this out as well, which is funny because
2:57:03
it was in my notes. They ask, "Do the animals or other inworld objects that
2:57:09
are depicted in the constellations have ritual significance in the world of Guardian?" And like,
2:57:16
no. Like, crabs don't show up. There's no centaurs, right?
2:57:22
Thank god. But you get the idea. Like, I get the idea. You would think that rams would like
2:57:28
mean something in Aries Town or whatever, but you don't see Not rams. It is so arbitrary and
2:57:33
completely mishandled. I I don't even have anything to say about it. Like there's nothing was done with this
2:57:38
conceit. It feels less than a pallet swap. Like
2:57:44
it feels like you could remove all of the astrology stuff and the story wouldn't change at all. The only thing
2:57:50
you would really have to rename would be like zodiac turning and Scorpio code,
2:57:56
right? You could just be like, "Oh, okay. There there is a there's like a magic changing
2:58:01
power that changes the magic that people are able to use. That would be zodiac turning. And then
2:58:07
you change Scorpio code to like I don't know the switcheroooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo code or whatever guys who who switcheroo
2:58:14
people's magic and it's not even like divergent where there's like a specific I there is and there isn't like a
2:58:21
character type associated with the the cult. I mean that obviously everyone has
2:58:26
their codes or whatever, but they're very they don't hold a lot of weight. I don't know. There's there's a lot of
2:58:31
homogeneity. Yeah, that's really all I wanted to say about Zodiac stuff. So, I think the first big question that I had that is
2:58:38
specifically a question is beyond getting the colleus. What are the characters
2:58:46
goals? We know Ra's goal, she wants to expose this lie,
2:58:51
but what about Chase? Like I get that he also agrees with Ra that this exposing
2:58:56
the conspiracy thing is a good idea, but like to what end, you know, and if not a an inworld actual achievement that he
2:59:04
wants to obtain, like emotionally, what is he after? Like does he chase

2:59:09
this feeling of having done something that's just and right? Um or does he come at from the other angle and want to
2:59:16
like stop people from being deceived because he cares very much about the deception of it? Um, and do these other
2:59:23
side characters have feelings that RA may or may not have depending on how
2:59:28
this changes in future drafts about like the long-term consequences of exposing the code and taking down the Stellarium,
2:59:34
right? Yeah. It's like what you said. I don't know when you said it, but you were like there's I want to get the
2:59:40
amulet, but in a good character, it's I want to get the amulet because of of
2:59:46
reasons of revenge or whatever. This would be a great idea for more like
2:59:52
almost contradictory character goals. Like what if Chase's motivations are
2:59:58
completely selfish? Like he wants glory for himself. He's been held back physically. He can't. He wants to be
3:00:05
swole, but he can't. He has like this pride in him. And achieving greatness through dismantling this power structure
3:00:12
is something that he sees as his ticket to it out of there. Like not to put him in like a nefarious position, but I just
3:00:19
mean like it doesn't have to be like gorch, I sure do hate oppression. There could be
3:00:25
hidden depths to these characters that get brought to the floor over the course of the series. And Ka in her even in her
3:00:31
young age, she seems so worldw I I wonder about a version of her that's
3:00:36
like I am going to step in and fill this power vacuum once the Scorpio Stellarium
3:00:42
goes down. I'm surrounded by both literal and metaphorical children. And I
3:00:47
am going to be the one with the with the correcting adult hand that sets things
3:00:52
right in the aftermath. And that could make her an outright enemy of the protagonists. Um, which I think is going
3:00:59
to become important in some form. I don't know how extreme it'll be, but these four core characters, I guess five
3:01:05
now, they can't be buddy buddy forever or it's going to get real dull real quick. It's fine if while they're on
3:01:12
this roller coaster ride of going from place to place to get the sword, they don't really have a ton of major rifts

3:01:18
between them because they are focused on this singular goal. But once they do that, then what? Because that's when the
3:01:25
what they want to do with the thing that they want to get comes out, right? And certainly they are
3:01:31
not all completely aligned on what comes after the Scorpio code being dismantled.
3:01:36
That would just be inconceivable. Mhm. God, that is just delicious to think about cuz you could really inject
3:01:42
anything to those characters. You could do what we were saying. You could uh Ka
3:01:47
worldweary maybe she also lusts for power in her own way or she she falls
3:01:53
back into the traps of the the people who came before them and comes to lust
3:01:59
for the power somehow. Anything you put into these characters, as long as you let it grow, is going to be good. I also
3:02:06
think that Audra needs to consider, and I know she's thought about this a good
3:02:12
bit, but I think she needs to really decide what is the main thing thematically that she wants to communicate with the first book in this
3:02:19
trilogy or I I guess she's never said it's a trilogy in this series. No, series. Yeah.
3:02:24
Because clearly she's interested in having a queer story. She's interested in exploring neurode divergence and
3:02:31
systemic oppression of neurode divergent people. There's stuff about erasing women's stories. There's that really
3:02:37
confusing bit that I read about the balance of of life and magic and whatever. Like these all cannot coexist
3:02:45
in the same novel. They can all coexist in the same series and one can be prominent in the first novel where the
3:02:53
others, you know, take on a more supporting role. Um, and then the one that's dominant will change depending on
3:02:58
which book we're in. But like there's too many big ideas going on in this book
3:03:03
that it frankly cannot hold. Especially with the pros being at the level that it's at. Like the pros cannot bear the
3:03:12
load of these big ideas yet. Not even one of them. So that's got to change first obviously.
3:03:18
But then I think Audrey you can pick you know which of these four ideas that I've identified maybe there's even more
3:03:25

do you want to focus on here? That kind of ties into a suggestion that I had. that I can just knock this one out. Um, I actually would want this book
3:03:32
to be a bit longer just in in general. Uh, it feels like, you know, we always
3:03:39
use the metaphor of accordioning. It feels like this is on the downswing of accordioning where things are really
3:03:46
chafing up against each other and nothing ever breathes or comes out as like the the dominant note. It's just so
3:03:54
break neck and it's double annoying because what we we've compressed are these character
3:04:00
beats and we focus on these completely stupid moments of them assuring Ra that
3:04:07
she's the most specialist girl in the world and she's never done anything wrong just falling over each other to be
3:04:13
the most magnanimous person in the room or they're dryly summarizing [ __ ] that already happened. maybe like finish that
3:04:20
compression and then expand it back out because I can offer a lot of suggestions for ways to expand and replace those
3:04:28
stupid vestigial scenes and have moments where you can play with these themes and develop on what you think that you
3:04:34
actually are trying to say here. Uh magic training montages, arguments
3:04:40
rather than apologies, descriptions of their travel. Uh I I don't know. they they meet a a
3:04:47
side character for a little bit. Someone helps or hinders them along the way. There's a lot in these archetypes that
3:04:53
you can draw from that would expand the story lengthwise, but make it feel just
3:05:01
a little bit easier on the brain and and and help breathe a little bit better. I
3:05:07
think something else that would help us not feel so much like events are chafing up against each other is if we stop
3:05:12
scene transitioning by falling asleep and then having a dream and then waking up. It becomes it becomes a really numbing
3:05:19
pattern. I feel anesthetized after it happens enough times. She falls asleep and I'm like this is a
3:05:25
good idea to do that too. Me next. Me next. Yeah. Please Audra curse 10%
3:05:33
less. 10% less. I'm not approved. I only censor bad words on this show. I I I
3:05:40
don't much anymore because YouTube has relaxed its monetization policy. But I don't censor [ __ ] because I don't like
3:05:47

the word. I'm not trying to say don't say [ __ ] But we don't need to talk like children who have just learned that they
3:05:54
won't combust if they swear. You know, like that one when you're 12, that one
3:05:59
period of time where you're like, "Oh, I can say [ __ ] and no one's going to like hurt me." It really just does not help
3:06:06
you in terms of credibility and and I just I just don't like it. It's one of those moments that feels
3:06:12
like the psychic strata of of the ages between 12 and 22 has like fossilized
3:06:17
into the narrative. Like she really wrote that at an age when it was exciting to swear
3:06:22
like it was a new toy that she had just gotten. I don't want to relitigate this because Jay and I we've already talked about it.
3:06:29
Uh we've we've both kind of come to the same conclusion. Uh, but I hear this over and over, so I want to say this
3:06:35
over and over. Audra, I do not give a [ __ ] what anyone tells you. Do not
3:06:41
change the weird hypocrisies about who does and does not follow certain codes
3:06:47
and who gets killed over it or why. Just make it intentional. Yeah. Just acknowledge it.
3:06:53
Just acknowledge it. Just make it intentional. Use this to your advantage. That's how religions work, you know.
3:07:00
Some some people will kill you over it and other people won't or it just depends on who you are and the time of
3:07:06
day. This is a critically important part of the messiness of our world. And
3:07:11
presenting it for the hypocrisy that it is will make this work so much more timeless than if every rule in Guardian
3:07:19
were airtight and reproducible in a lab. You love someone as a Scorpio, you get
3:07:25
murdered. like this is I I need this to stay the way that it is for as messy as
3:07:31
it is. Yeah. It just needs to be something that the characters actually reckon with because there's moments
3:07:36
where it doesn't make sense. Like when they see somebody get killed by the police and then two seconds later Ra is
3:07:42
verbally like, "Yeah, the code is dumb." Like that isn't the reaction you would have in that situation. Like I can see I
3:07:49
can see Ra really wanting to break it because she almost feels defiant of what
3:07:54
she just witnessed and it feels like a small kind of vengeance to express some emotion to Chase. But again, we need to

3:08:00
acknowledge that she's like, I just saw these guys get killed and and [ __ ] it, I'm going to express some emotion anyway
3:08:05
because like if we're going to get killed, then we might as well get killed. Something something just I don't
3:08:12
know. While I'm reiterating things, I want to give more concrete ideas to the
3:08:17
whole problem with Aia just throwing her life away for RA's [ __ ] despite one
3:08:23
chapter earlier, like being dismissive of even the idea of Ra caring about
3:08:28
things that aren't orthodox. Um, you have a couple paths to address this
3:08:34
issue. the weakest viable option is some contrivance where say they're they're
3:08:41
running through the street being chased by cops. They literally run into Aia and
3:08:46
she gets swept up in the fray. I don't think this is the best way forward, but it is a way forward that could work if
3:08:53
well executed. You could also keep things exactly the same as they are now
3:08:58
and just play up how much of a sacrifice this is for Aia, which it is. She is
3:09:03
throwing away her life that she is heads are rolling and she's just jumping right into it. But at the end of the day,
3:09:10
she's still Ra's sister and there is that love there. And I think having like this heart of gold with Ra would add a
3:09:19
little bit of depth and development to her. Even if we keep a lot of her arc the same or lack of arc the same, I
3:09:25
should say. My ideal solution would be somewhere in the middle. like she still has this like internal conflict, but
3:09:32
they also don't just walk up to her and press A. There's some action scene like
3:09:38
something anything happens that makes AIA coming in and joining the party inelectable, but still has like this
3:09:46
element of well, you're still my sister, which will soften her character cuz I feel like some people can get put off by
3:09:52
her. I honestly don't have a problem with her like even a little bit. She seems like totally fine. But I think that you're
3:09:58
right. There's probably a smoother way that she could be brought into this quest that's going to like conceivably
3:10:04
ruin her life. Um maybe maybe she does feel resentful of it, but
3:10:09

she knows that Atlas is on their side and so she thinks that maybe it'll be worth it career-wise in the end because
3:10:16
he might still, you know, bestow some kind of boon upon her or something like that. Sure, there there's ways to make it work, but
3:10:22
yeah, I see what you're saying. I would like a tighter association between the theorion masks that Ra and Nar wear and
3:10:30
the fact that spectral wolves seem to have this level of outplaced importance in the narrative even though they only
3:10:36
come up in two chapters maybe like at the very beginning and the very end.
3:10:41
Ra doesn't seem to identify or care about wolves.
3:10:48
There's actually two discrete types of shadow demon dogs. There's there's
3:10:54
taxonomies because there's the ones that like spawn out of the forest, which seem like maybe they're regular wolves that
3:11:00
like get possessed or or shapeshift when the forest activates, but then there's also the spirit wolves that the Scorpio
3:11:08
cops can summon because like summoning demon animals is like separately a magic power that some people just have. So,
3:11:14
you're right. There's like multiple instances where these ghost wolves pop up, but it seems weird. Like why them,
3:11:21
right? And and why are they dressing up as wolves? What's the connection? Like there there's lip service paid to this,
3:11:27
but it doesn't work when it's at the very beginning and the very end even if they featured a little bit more or like
3:11:33
I don't think there's a wolf zodiac sign, but uh I guess so. So So there's nothing you can do there. This is an
3:11:39
instance where I do think that the world building is deeper than it's being led on because I think Audra has an interest
3:11:46
in wolves that is not quite translating to the page the way that it should be.
3:11:52
I totally buy that. Or just get rid of the wolves cuz they don't they don't do much. But I either or more or less wolves. More or zero
3:11:59
wolves. Make one of the wolves that lives in Conviction Woods a different animal. and
3:12:04
then make the spirits that the cops summon not wolves or dogs or whatever they are. Make them a different animal
3:12:09
as well. And then this whole thing goes away. We should see Nar's necklace a tick earlier.
3:12:15

It's It's too cheap if it's the first thing we see. Uh but the way that it works right now
3:12:21
is it's all in the same scene. Ra sees the necklace, tears it off. Now N is
3:12:26
100% hunky dory. No problem. It's too cheap. And even if even if it were the
3:12:33
penultimate scene where Nar is the bad guy that we see the necklace and maybe Ra just thinks about it and then grabs
3:12:41
it out of desperation in the actual scene where it currently happens. It would go a long way to making that
3:12:47
matter and making me care. Yeah. Literally it it's it's really
3:12:53
weird because as far as I know there's only two magical items that we see in this entire book. Both of them are
3:13:00
necklaces, but they seem to have no relationship to one another. And it raises questions about what role like
3:13:07
artifificing plays in this world. Yeah. And it's a distracting question that I don't think you want us to be asking.
3:13:14
Doesn't matter. So, you got to do something to clean it up. I I I think Andrew's ideas are fine there. Just show it to us earlier and
3:13:21
then maybe we won't be wondering about it so much. Something that's been sort of conspicuously absent from I think our
3:13:27
entire conversation today is any talk of Audra's quote unquote team that she is
3:13:32
constantly referring to in Tik Tok. And that's because we're trying to stay out of the drama, right? Um but I think that
3:13:38
it has to be at least acknowledged. And I'd like for you to keep that acknowledgement in mind, Audra, as I
3:13:43
give you this final note. Um so I'm going to tell you a little story. When the German poet Reiner Maria Rilka
3:13:49
looked at the torso of this like crumbling statue of Apollo, he wrote
3:13:55
this poem that ends in the line dum endon or you must change your life. What
3:14:02
he meant by that was basically exactly what it says which is unusual for the ending of a poem and I think why it has
3:14:08
stood the test of time. He meant that if you want your life to improve in some
3:14:14
kind of specific way, you can't count on any external force to be the agent of
3:14:19
that improvement. You have to do it. As you may know uh from perusing our
3:14:26

backlog or something like that, I believe that all writing is fundamentally an effort to communicate.
3:14:33
and what huge swaths of your fan base is trying to tell you. And I use that word unironically because I think that there
3:14:40
are a lot of people out there who really are rooting for you and want this to be an amazing comeback story. Us included. Andrew is raising his hand. I'm raising
3:14:46
my hand. What we are telling you is that you have failed to communicate
3:14:52
this time. Emphasis on this time. I understand any impulse you might have
3:14:57
upon hearing that to play like a little what aboutism game. You know, like well what about my target audience? What
3:15:02
about context? What about the neurode divergent subject position of RA? Blah blah blah blah blah. But the fact is,
3:15:08
while you know, Andrew and I may not be your exact target audience, we are close enough to, I think, have a valuable
3:15:15
perspective on this. And to be frank, you're writing in a pretty familiar genre using pretty
3:15:20
familiar tropes about characters who I feel like are shadows of people that I have known in my real life.
3:15:27
Absolutely. So, this is all very, very familiar. And despite all that, you have failed to
3:15:32
communicate whatever it is you want to communicate. But again, you failed to communicate this time. You can try
3:15:39
again. And we are asking you to try again. And it seems like you really are trying again.
3:15:44
But this is why I brought the team up earlier. You must change your life. You
3:15:51
cannot rely on a copy editor, on a developmental editor, on any of the
3:15:56
feedback that you are getting online, whether it's from us or from anybody else to do this change for you. If you
3:16:03
want to communicate, you need to step back. You need to refine your relationship to the barest fundamentals
3:16:09
of language. I'm talking vocabulary. I'm talking grammar. And you need to rewrite
3:16:15
this thing. You need to change your life. and offering that advice I think is the extent of what we are able to do
3:16:22
on your behalf because ultimately it's going to come down to you not your copy editors and especially not your artists.
3:16:30
It's so frustrating to me, and I think this is a good time to segue into kind of more metatitual aspects of this

3:16:37
book's production, is like the level of obstinence being displayed when when the
3:16:43
internet is telling you that, and the internet is very cruel, so I do understand being defensive, but the
3:16:48
level of obstinance that I'm seeing just kind of makes me so sad. And it
3:16:54
goes back to to times where I've kind of let my tongue slip and be meaner than I'm intending to because there are group
3:17:01
messages out there between me and Jay where I'm saying the exact kind of thing
3:17:07
that Audrey says in her in her Tik Toks about how much this world means to her
3:17:12
and how people aren't understanding these characters that mean so much to her. And a lot of it can be read as
3:17:19
being duplicitous depending on the presentation of it. But I do believe to an extent the the sentiment is very very
3:17:27
genuine or I hope it is because I can relate to it. And God knows what I would have done if I had a TikTok when I was
3:17:34
22 and I thought I had a book that would change the world and then I realized
3:17:39
that it wasn't very good. And that's that sucks. But it's something that happens to people. And the inclusion of
3:17:46
this this outplaced virality just makes everything so much so much
3:17:52
worse. No, I'm right there with you. Like I'm worried about Audra's future as a writer because she got this attention
3:17:58
on something that wasn't ready. There's real potential here for this to crystallize as her online writing
3:18:06
identity and in doing so she could rob herself of so much growth as a writer. I
3:18:11
think if I can overstep, assuming that I haven't already, I think the right move is to just disappear. Refund whoever you
3:18:20
can possibly refund. I mean, to be honest, people who pre-ordered the first draft of this bought something without
3:18:26
knowing what they were buying. And that's just kind of how purchasing things works. Sometimes don't really necessarily owe them anything. If you're
3:18:32
able to refund them, maybe do. But just disappear. Disappear and get better at writing. and
3:18:40
then come back when you have something that's ready to go. Because I'm really worried that what's going to happen with this is that we're going to get locked
3:18:46
in a cycle of like endless revising, especially if the second version of the

3:18:51
first book comes out and it's like not good. Then what happens? Do we revise it again?
3:18:56
Probably not, right? Because that's just getting absurd. I don't know where else it goes, though.
3:19:01
I'm so worried about this rewrite. I am I am more worried about this rewrite than I am at the long-term success of of
3:19:09
Audrey's career because the people that are going to get in her ear, I've already said I don't I don't mean to
3:19:16
like imply that I know anything or I don't mean to be rude, but I just don't think they're going to learn the right
3:19:22
lessons from this because so much of the content being created about this book and so much of the things that the
3:19:28
editor, the new editor that she just hired acknowledges about this book is about worldbuilding.
3:19:34
And I don't give a [ __ ] about world building. This book is not going to magically get better if all the unions
3:19:41
are are logically grouped by a classical element. If all of the rules of all of
3:19:47
the different signs make perfect sense. Like there are people out there for example who love A Song of Ice and Fire,
3:19:54
smart people who could not tell you the first thing about the Defiance of Duskandale. There are people who love
3:20:01
Wheel of Time who can't name all of the Trollot clans. If you focus on what's
3:20:07
all the different laws of this world, how do people trade with each other? What's the history? And not focus on
3:20:14
what words mean. You're just not ever going to end up with a good book. And I and I just hate
3:20:20
hearing all this stuff about this stupid [ __ ] world. It doesn't matter. Yeah. It's kind of Reddit.
3:20:26
It's so Reddit. It's like, "Oh, look. I I made a map and I posted it and also like you said here's like a million trade routes and
3:20:32
here's all the different crops that all different countries grow and it's like that's all cool stuff but that's the
3:20:37
kind of stuff that's cool in the context of like a worldbuing game like for example the quiet year or stuff that's
3:20:43
cool in the context of maybe like um a document that lets you play a TTRPG.
3:20:49
I've heard people say that this was meant to be a TTRPG and not a book. Um, and I think that that is frankly a
3:20:55

completely stupid suggestion having read the book because this world is not yet built. But if Audra is sincerely
3:21:03
interested in becoming a better world builder, she could definitely become the kind of person who develops worlds for
3:21:09
TTRPGs. That's a bit of a divergence, but in any case, like the things that make a good
3:21:15
book are not the world building. It's knowing how to write a book. The world
3:21:20
building is like background. Yeah. Yeah. Let me let me let me kind of temper my little rant there because I I
3:21:26
I think that's kind of the the right way to put it. Like world building is more or less a hamster wheel. You can work on
3:21:32
it, add infin item, tweak this, that, and the other thing, and it's still not going to be realistic no matter what you
3:21:38
do because you're not God andor science. Um you're and
3:21:45
so's God. So God, right, right, right. And most people aren't going to care. I'm worried
3:21:52
that Audra is going to be spinning her wheels on on these little things and not realizing that the necklace is
3:22:00
introduced way too soon or Chase doesn't have any secondary motivations. They're
3:22:06
not as fun to nitpick because they're not as like they're not as like readyy, I guess, but they're what makes or
3:22:13
breaks a book. The world could be just as stupid as it is now. And that's what I get frustrated about because like I do
3:22:20
believe that the skeleton of the book is there. The scenes that connect it together are bad and the words that are
3:22:27
used to create it are bad. The words are so bad. The words are so bad. But I believe that
3:22:34
the skeleton of what is trying to be done here can work. It is not because I I don't understand the why there's two
3:22:42
different mailing addresses for AIA that makes this book bad. Somewhere in the
3:22:47
delusion of death, I returned to Conviction Woods. Though I wasn't sure if I was dead yet or on the verge of an
3:22:54
afterlife, a low glow illuminated from between two trees. I stumbled toward it
3:23:00
in the soft summer soil. Reflections of my childhood danced around me, and the
3:23:05
ghosts of the past swiveled in a low mist, cloaking the trees. Visions of Avia and me running through the pines
3:23:11

drifted through the firefly glow, mirrors of all my memories. Uh, boring,
3:23:16
boring, boring. And as I stepped toward the light, a branch cracked behind me. I
3:23:22
whirled around, my gaze yanked from the light. The shadow of the woods was behind me, a looming familiar darkness,
3:23:29
pines scented of death and despair to outsiders. Though I was accustomed to its perils, the woods were warm to me.
3:23:37
My home, and they had always been my home. The presence of another creature was looming thick in the forest air.
3:23:44
According to the myths, the wolves of Conviction Woods could transcend plains. Dad had told me when I was a child,
3:23:50
their devouring darkness would transport you to a limbo, an in between of the dark and light. In one bite, you'd be
3:23:57
swallowed whole. The woods itself was a blend of dark and light, a duality our world couldn't quite understand.
3:24:04
Shutting off outsiders. In the corner of my eye, a reflection of my father, yet
3:24:10
not quite my father, flashed by me. I'd kind of been wondering if the pros would
3:24:17
feel more inviting when read aloud, but it doesn't.
3:24:24
My attention still slides right off of it, just like when I'm reading it on the page, which uh so disappointing.
3:24:32
I want to close out just by saying that I have been thrilled, just very, very
3:24:38
happy with the internet's response to Audrey Winter. mostly. I mean, obviously
3:24:43
there's people on TikTok who are like heranging her or whatever, but I have seen almost universally in the people
3:24:50
that like I've come to respect people rooting for Audra and people wanting
3:24:55
Audrey to be better. People having Audra's best interests at heart, which
3:25:00
is not something that I think we see a lot with other other authors who are subjected to similar controversies. She
3:25:08
was ripe for lull cowifying quite frankly. Like the way that she so
3:25:14
quickly switched her personality from like writer to entrepreneur I think was
3:25:20
indicative of like a very malleable identity that could very very easily have been tampered with by people with
3:25:26
ill intentions. And the fact that that didn't happen is a little bit miraculous. I'm very happy about that. And let me

3:25:31
say upfront that I regret having to temper this with preaching, much less
3:25:37
preaching to the choir, but I would not be doing my job if I didn't mention uh
3:25:43
in regards to the team that everyone likes to meme on. Things are bad right now. Things are bad right now and they
3:25:50
are going to get worse within our lifetime. As as writers, artists, human
3:25:56
beings, we are surrounded on all sides. Our enemies are beating us into a
3:26:01
stouper. They are trying to kill and harvest our creative output. And treason
3:26:07
is devouring us from within every single time an author creates an AI generated
3:26:12
image or uses uses [ __ ] Grammarly or whatever. I don't know. The people who
3:26:19
are trying to destroy you, my my fellow writers, artists, podcast enjoyers,
3:26:25
six-f figureure entrepreneurs, our enemies are doing it without regard for
3:26:30
law, without regard for morality, without regard for ethics. Good. We should find this fact
3:26:38
liberating. To paraphrase Napoleon, she who employs human artists commits no crimes.
3:26:47
If we are going to survive this just and terrible struggle that we have in front
3:26:52
of us, we need to ally ourselves with people we would otherwise find reprehensible, perhaps entrepreneurs.
3:27:00
We need to be restorative rather than punitive. And I think we are. I just
3:27:06
don't want this to come without a warning that the alternative to what
3:27:11
we're doing right now, if you can call it that, is the complete annihilation of
3:27:16
all that we know. So, I I'm happy about the response to Audrey Winters, but I'm
3:27:23
just I'm I'm very very scared about the precarious position that we're in. It's
3:27:28
very interesting to me having to juggle the fact that I really have a lot of problems with how Audra presents
3:27:34
herself, but still believe so strongly in her mission to only employ human artists and only bring humans into this
3:27:41
equation in a time where it would be so easy to put this [ __ ] into co-pilot or
3:27:46
whatever. God, yes. I hope that she doesn't let those people down by um spending more
3:27:53
money than she has promised to give them. That's true. I there's there's a lot that can go wrong
3:27:59

right now. There is so much that can go wrong, not just in the world, but in the Audra
3:28:04
Winter world, right? I really really hope that she isn't employing these artists as part of what
3:28:11
is purely like an ego trip to see her world realized before it inevitably
3:28:18
collapses um under the weight of her inability to master writing in so quick
3:28:24
a time. Um, I'm really worried that that's where we're heading with this situation.
3:28:29
My question is, if the check's clear, does it matter
3:28:34
if it's an ego trip or not? Yeah. Does it matter if it's an ego trip or not? If if the checks clear and human
3:28:40
artists receive compensation for their labor. No. No. I I mean, I would be reasonably satisfied with that outcome personally.
3:28:46
Um, I would be bummed out that that Audrey Winter robbed herself of the opportunity to grow as a writer. Um,
3:28:53
no, no, no. But I would be I would be glad that human artists were getting paid for their work and I would be glad
3:28:59
with the way that the like online book community handled the situation. Like responses I that I have seen have been
3:29:07
unhappy but they have not been cruel. And I think that that is a real rarity. It's such a rarity. And and I I think it
3:29:14
speaks to the fact that I don't believe Audra Winters is our enemy. Not now at
3:29:19
least. We have to we have to be pragmatic. We have to practice real politic. I'm happy, but I'm also so
3:29:26
scared is what I'm trying to get across. It is really nice to see that for the most part, we are not treating Audrey
3:29:33
Winter like an enemy. She has come from within our ranks and we might not want
3:29:39
her to be the most public-f facing member of the online book world right now. But if she is going to be
3:29:45
prominent, we can at least send a message by treating her with respect so that people who are watching from the
3:29:50
outside see that you know this this is the kind of space that we want to foster. One where we will be honest with
3:29:57
our peers um but we will never be cruel to them. Absolutely. It's what we have said over
3:30:04
and over and over again this episode. We want more and we want more intentional.
3:30:10
Mhm. But I think that's all I have for for Audra today. I think that we have given Audra more

3:30:16
than enough. Go read Rilka. Go read Lee Young Lee. Change your life. And we are
3:30:25
dust. We are dust. I don't want to follow up from that.
Final Thoughts
3:30:32
[Music] In the vascular system, Liban healing is a blood-based magic that converts to
3:30:38
magical energy. Spirit walking is a water-based magic that converts to magical energy. They are highly
3:30:44
interconnected magic systems in the human body and co-evolved as the earliest forms of magic. That's actually
3:30:49
so cool, I said, looking over at them. I struggled to understand how they weren't more fascinated with the entirely new
3:30:56
magic system we'd been exposed to. We have all three arch powers. Yeah, I feel
3:31:02
left out," Aia grumbled. I rolled my eyes at her. "At least you don't have to
3:31:07
worry about being chased around by the Stellarium for something you can't control."
3:31:13
I hope you guys have enjoyed this um scatterbrained, hyperfixated little episode of the SBU English Club. Uh, I
3:31:21
know things got animated here and there, but hopefully this what we've come out with at the end of the day is the full
3:31:27
accounting of the things that we think are strengths of this book and what we think it would take to get this to a new
3:31:36
level of literature. It definitely hasn't been the easiest process to get to this point, but I I think I had fun
3:31:42
with it. I hope you guys did, too. I think this has been a super super productive meeting. not to just keep
3:31:47
repeating myself, but I really hope that you're listening to this. Audra, I hope that you extract at least one useful
3:31:53
thing from it and uh we wish you all the best. Well, Audra, you are welcome in
3:31:59
the English club anytime. Uh the door is always open whenever uh whenever we have
3:32:05
club mandated access to it. We used to get locked out of the real English club room a lot. I was actually really pissed
3:32:12
off about that, but uh that doesn't happen here at St. Balisar University. We got the skeleton key.
3:32:18
That's right. Until our next meeting, Audra, we will see you around campus. See you around campus.
3:32:25

Pressed against my skin, the rune now throbbed with a pale red light. It emanated a low, gentle chime, vibrating
3:32:32
against me, spewing out from the magic was a fragrance that made anything I'd ever smelled before pale in comparison.
3:32:40
It was somewhat of a mix between the strongest smelling pine I'd ever found in conviction woods, acurid, fresh
3:32:47
blood, barely sulfuric with notes of a strangely sweet and unrecognizable
3:32:53
floral. I leaned away from it. It paused its humming, the smell gentled.
3:32:59
I mean, that that that's sensory detail for you. I got I guess it speaks for itself or it
3:33:05
smells for itself. I have a lot to say about that passage. Actually, this will be exciting.

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